TREVLYN HOLD

Mrs. Henry Wood

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A NOVEL

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD

AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC.

ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTH THOUSAND

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TREVLYN HOLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCARLET CRAVAT.

THE fine summer had faded into autumn, and the autumn would soon be fading into winter. All signs of harvest had disappeared. The farmers had gathered the golden grain into their barns; the meads looked bare, and the partridges hid themselves in the stubble left by the reapers.

Perched on the top of a stile which separated one field from another, was a boy of some fifteen years. Several books, a strap passed round to keep them together, were flung over his shoulder, and he sat throwing stones into a pond close by, softly whistling as he did so. The stones came out of his pocket. Whether stored there for the purpose to which they were now being put, was best known to himself. He was a slender, well-made boy, with finely-shaped features, a clear complexion, and eyes dark and earnest. A refined face; a good face—and you have not to learn that the face is the outward index of the mind within. An index that never fails for those gifted with the power to read the human countenance.

Before him at a short distance, as he sat on the stile, lay the village of Barbrook. A couple of miles beyond the village was the large town of Barmester. But you could reach the town without taking the village *en route.* As to the village itself, there were several ways of reaching it. There was the path through the fields, right in front of the stile where that schoolboy was sitting; there was the green and shady lane (knee-deep in mud sometimes); and there were two high-roads. From the signs of vegetation around—not that the vegetation was of the richest kind—you would never suspect that the barren and bleak lands of coal-fields lay so near. Only four or five miles

away in the opposite direction—that is, behind the boy and the stile—the coal-pits flourished. Farmhouses were scattered within view, had the young gentleman on the stile chosen to look at them; a few gentlemen's houses, and many cottages and hovels. To his left hand, glancing over the field and across the upper road—the road which did not lead to Barbrook, but to Barmester—on a slight eminence, rose the fine but old-fashioned mansion called Trevlyn Hold. Rather to the right, behind him, was the less pretentious, but comfortable dwelling, called Trevlyn Farm. Trevlyn Hold, formerly the property and residence of Squire Trevlyn, had passed, with that gentleman's death, into the hands of Mr. Chattaway, who now lived in it; his wife having been the Squire's second daughter. Trevlyn Farm was tenanted by Mr. Ryle; and the boy now sitting on the stile was Mr. Ryle's eldest son.

There came, scuffling along the field-path from the village, a wan-looking, under-sized girl, as fast as her dilapidated shoes permitted her. The one shoe was tied on with a piece of rag; the other, not being tied on with anything, constantly came off, and impeded her progress. She had almost gained the pond, when a boy considerably taller and stronger than the one on the stile came flying down the field on the left, and planted himself in her way.

"Now then, you little toad! Do you want another buffeting?"

"Oh, please, sir, don't stop me!" she cried, beginning to sob unnecessarily loudly. "Father's a-dying, and mother said I was to run and tell them at the farm. Please let me go by."

"Did I not order you yesterday to keep out of these fields?" asked the tall boy. "There's the lane and there are the roads open to you; how dare you come here? I promised you I'd shake the inside out of you if I caught you here again, and now I'll do it."

"I say," called out at this juncture the lad on the stile, "you keep your hands off her."

The child's assailant turned sharply at the sound. He had not seen that any one was there. For one moment he relaxed his hold of the girl, but the next appeared to change his mind, and began to shake her. She turned her face, in all its tears and its dirt, towards the stile.

"Oh, Master George, make him let me go! I'm a-hasting on to your house, Master George. Father, he's lying all

white upon the bed; and mother said I was to come off and tell of it."

George leaped off the stile, and advanced. "You let her go, Cris Chattaway!"

Cris Chattaway turned his anger upon George. "Mind your own business, you beggar! It is no concern of yours."

"It is, if I choose to make it mine. Let her go, I say. Don't be a coward."

"What's that you call me?" asked Cris Chattaway. "A coward? Take that."

He had picked up a hard clod of earth, and dashed it in George Ryle's face. The boy was not one to stand a gratuitous blow, and Mr. Christopher, before he knew what was coming, found himself on the ground. The girl, released, flew to the stile and scrambled over it. George stood his ground, waiting for Cris to get up; he was less tall and strong, but he would not run away.

Christopher Chattaway slowly gathered himself up. He *was* a coward; and fighting, when it came to close quarters, was not to his mind. Stone-throwing, or water-squirting, or pea-shooting—any annoyance that might be safely carried on at a distance—he was an adept in; but hand-to-hand fighting—Cris did not relish that.

"See if you don't suffer for this, George Ryle!"

George laughed good-humouredly, and sat down on the stile as before. Cris was dusting the earth off his clothes.

"You have called me a coward, and you have knocked me down. I'll enter it in my memorandum-book, George Ryle."

"Do," equably returned George. "I never knew any *but* cowards set upon girls."

"I'll set upon her again, if I catch her using this path. There's not a more impudent little wretch in all the parish. Let her try it, that's all."

"She has a right to use this path as much as I have."

"Not if I choose to say she shan't use it. *You* won't have the right long."

"Oh, indeed!" said George. "What is to take it from me?"

"The Squire says he shall cause this way through the fields to be closed."

"*Who* says it?" asked George, with marked emphasis—and the sound grated on Cris Chattaway's ear.

"The Squire says so," he roared. "Are you deaf?"

"Ah," said George. "But Mr. Chattaway can't close it. My father says he has not the power."

"*Your* father!" contemptuously rejoined Cris Chattaway. "He would like his leave asked, perhaps. When the Squire says he shall do a thing, he means it."

"At any rate, it is not done yet," was the significant answer. "Don't boast, Cris."

Cris had been making off, and was some distance up the field. He turned to address George.

"You know, you beggar, that if I don't go in and polish you off it's because I can't condescend to tarnish my hands. When I fight, I like to fight with gentlepeople." And with that he turned tail, and decamped quicker than before.

"Just so," shrieked George. "Especially if they wear petticoats."

A sly shower of earth came back in answer. But it happened, every bit of it, to steer clear of him, and George kept his seat and his equanimity.

"What has he been doing now, George?"

George turned his head; the question came from some one behind him. There stood a lovely boy of some twelve years old, his beautiful features set off by dark blue eyes and silky curls of a bright auburn.

"Where did you spring from, Rupert?"

"I came down by the hedge. You did not hear me. You were calling after Cris. Has he been beating you, George?"

"Beating me!" returned George, throwing back his handsome face with a laugh. "I don't think he would like to try that on, Rupert. He could not beat me with impunity, as he does you."

Rupert Trevlyn laid his cheek on the stile, and fixed his eyes on the clear blue evening sky—for the sun was drawing towards its setting. He was a sensitive, romantic, strange sort of boy; gentle and loving by nature, but given to violent fits of passion. People said he inherited the latter from his grandfather, Squire Trevlyn. Others of the Squire's descendants had inherited the same. Under happier auspices, Rupert might have learnt to subdue these bursts of passion. Had he possessed a kind home and loving friends, how different might have been his destiny.

"George, I wish papa had lived!"

"The whole parish has need to wish that," returned George. "I wish you stood in his shoes! That's what I wish."

"Instead of Uncle Chattaway. Old Canham says I ought to stand in them. He says he thinks I shall, some time, because justice is almost sure to come uppermost in the end."

"Look here, Rupert!" gravely returned George Ryle. "Don't you go listening to old Canham. He talks nonsense, and it will do neither of you good. If Chattaway heard only a tithe of what he sometimes says, he'd turn him from the lodge, neck and crop, in spite of Miss Diana. What *is*, can't be helped, you know, Rupert."

"But Cris has no right to inherit Trevlyn over me."

"He has the right of law, I suppose," answered George; "at least, he will have it. Make the best of it, Ru. There are lots of things that I have to make the best of. I had a caning yesterday for another boy, and I had to make the best of that."

Rupert still looked up at the sky. "If it were not for Aunt Edith," quoth he, "I'd run away."

"You little stupid! Where would you run to?"

"Anywhere. Mr. Chattaway gave me no dinner to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because Cris carried a tale to him. But it was false, George."

"Did you tell Chattaway it was false?"

"Yes. But where's the use? He always believes Cris before me."

"Have you had no dinner?"

Rupert shook his head. "I took a bit of bread off the tray as they were carrying it through the hall. That's all I have had."

"Then I'd advise you to make double-quick haste home to your tea," said George, jumping over the stile, "as I am going to do to mine."

George ran swiftly across the back fields towards his home. Looking round when he was well on his way, he saw the lad, Rupert, still leaning on the stile with his face turned upward.

Meanwhile the little tatterdemalion of a girl had scuffled along to Trevlyn Farm—a very moderately-sized house, with a rustic porch covered with jessamine, and a large garden, more useful than ornamental, intervening between it and the high-road. The garden path, leading to the porch, was straight and narrow; on either side rose alternately cabbage-rose-trees and hollyhocks. Gooseberries, currants, strawberries, raspberries, and other plain fruit-trees, grew amidst vegetables of various

sorts. A productive garden, if not an elegant one. At the side of the house the fold-yard palings and a five-barred gate divided it from the public road, and behind the house were the barns and other outdoor buildings belonging to the farm.

From the porch the entrance led direct into a room, half sitting-room, half kitchen. It was called "Nora's room." Nora generally sat in it; George and his brother did their lessons in it, the actual kitchen being at the back. A parlour opening from this room on the right, whose window looked into the fold-yard, was the general sitting-room of the family. The best sitting-room, a really handsome apartment, was on the other side of the house. As the girl scuffled up to the porch, an active, black-eyed, talkative little woman, of five or six-and-thirty, from the window of the best kitchen, saw her approaching. It was Nora. What with the child's ragged frock and tippet, her broken straw bonnet, her slipshod shoes, and her face smeared with dirt and tears, she looked wretched enough. Her father, Jim Sanders, was carter to Mr. Ryle. He had been at home ill the last day or two; or, as the phrase ran in the farm, was "off his work."

"If ever I saw such an object!" was Nora's exclamation. "How *can* her mother keep her in that state? Just look at that Letty Sanders, Mrs. Ryle!"

Sorting large bunches of sweet herbs on a table at the back of the room, was a tall, upright woman. Her dress was plain, but her manner and bearing bespoke the lady. Those familiar with the district would have recognized in her handsome, but somewhat masculine face, a likeness to the well-formed, powerful features of the late Squire Trevlyn. She was that gentleman's eldest daughter, and had given mortal umbrage to her family when she quitted Trevlyn Hold to become the second wife of Mr. Ryle. George Ryle was not her son. She had only two children: Trevlyn, a boy two years younger than George; and a little girl of eight, named Caroline.

Mrs. Ryle turned round, and glanced at the garden path and at Letty Sanders. "She *is* an object! See what she wants, Nora."

Nora, who had no patience with idleness and its signs, opened the door with a fling. The girl halted a few paces off the porch, and dropped a curtsey.

"Please, father be dreadful bad," began she. "He be lying on the bed and he don't stir, and he have got nothing but

white in his face; and, please, mother said I was to come and tell the missus, and ask her for a spoonful o' brandy."

"And how dare your mother send you up to the house in this trim?" demanded Nora. "How many crows did you frighten as you came along?"

"Please," whimpered the child, "she haven't had time to tidy me to-day, father's been so bad, and t'other frock was tored in the washin'."

"Of course," assented Nora. "Everything is 'tored' that she has to do with, and it never gets mended. If ever there was a poor, moithering, thriftless thing, it's that mother of yours. She has no needles and no thread, I suppose, and neither soap nor water?"

Mrs. Ryle came forward to interrupt the colloquy. "What is the matter with your father, Letty? Is he worse?"

Letty dropped half-a-dozen curtseys in succession. "Please, 'm, it's his inside as have been bad again, but mother's afeared he's dying. He has fell back upon the bed, and he don't stir nor breathe. She says, will you please send him a spoonful o' brandy?"

"Have you brought anything to put it in?" inquired Mrs. Ryle.

"No, 'm."

"It's not likely," chimed in Nora. "Meg Sanders wouldn't think to send so much as a cracked teacup. Shall I put a drop in a bottle, and give it to her?" continued Nora, turning to Mrs. Ryle.

"No," replied Mrs. Ryle. "I must know what's the matter with him before I send brandy. Go back to your mother, Letty. Tell her I shall be going past her cottage presently, and will call in."

The child turned and scuffled off. Mrs. Ryle resumed to Nora:

"Should it be another attack of inward inflammation, brandy would be the worst thing he could take. He drinks too much, does Jim Sanders."

"His inside's like a barrel—always waiting to be filled," remarked Nora. "He'd drink the sea dry if it ran beer. What with his drinking, and her untidiness, small wonder that the children are in rags. I am surprised the master keeps him on!"

"He only drinks by fits and starts, Nora. His health will not let him do more."

"No, it won't," acquiesced Nora. "And I misdoubt me but this bout may be the ending of him. That hole was not dug for nothing."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Ryle. "Find Treve, will you, Nora; and get him ready."

"Treve," a young gentleman given to have his own way, and to be kept very much from school on account of "delicate health," a malady more imaginary than real, was found somewhere about the farm, and put into visiting condition. He and his mother were invited to take tea at Barbrook. In point of fact, the invitation had been for Mrs. Ryle only; but she could not bear to stir anywhere without her darling boy Trevlyn.

They had barely departed when George entered. Nora had then spread the tea on the table, and was standing cutting bread-and-butter.

"Where are they all?" asked George, depositing his books upon a small sideboard.

"Your mamma and Treve are off to tea at Mrs. Apperley's," replied Nora. "And the master, he rode over to Barmester this afternoon, and is not back yet. Sit down, George. Would you like a taste of pumpkin pie?"

"Try me," responded George. "Is there any?"

"I saved it you from dinner," said Nora, bringing forth a plate from a closet. "It is not much. Treve's stomach is as craving for pies as Jim Sanders's is for beer; and Mrs. Ryle would give him all he wanted, if it cleared the dish——. Is that somebody calling?" she broke off, going to the window. "George, it's Mr. Chattaway! See what he wants."

A gentleman on horseback had reined in close to the gate: a spare man, rather above the middle height, with a pale, leaden sort of complexion, small, cold light eyes, and mean-looking features. George ran down the path.

"Is your father at home, George?"

"No. He is gone to Barmester"

A scowl passed over Mr. Chattaway's brow. "That's the third time I have been here this week, and cannot get to see him. Tell your father, George, that I have had another letter from Butt, and that I'll trouble him to attend to it. Tell your father I will not be pestered with this business any longer, and if he does not pay the money right off, I'll make him pay it."

Something not unlike an ice-shaft shot through George

Ryle's heart. He knew there was trouble between his house and Mr. Chattaway; that his father was, in pecuniary matters, at Mr. Chattaway's mercy. Was this move, this message, the result of his recent encounter with Cris Chattaway? A hot flush dyed his face, and he wished—for his father's sake—that he had let Mr. Cris alone. For his father's sake he was now ready to eat humble-pie to Mr. Chattaway, though there never lived a boy less inclined to eat humble-pie in a general way than George Ryle. He went close up to the horse and raised his honest eyes fearlessly.

"Has Christopher been complaining to you, Mr. Chattaway?"

"No. What has he to complain of?"

"Not much," answered George, his fears subsiding. "Only I know he does carry tales."

"Were there no tales to carry he could not carry them," coldly remarked Mr. Chattaway. "I have not seen Christopher since dinner-time. It seems to me that you are always trying to suspect him of something. Take care that you deliver my message correctly, sir."

Mr. Chattaway rode away, and George returned to his pumpkin pie. He had scarcely eaten it—with remarkable relish, for the cold dinner he took with him to school daily was little more than a lunch—when Mr. Ryle entered. He came in by the back-door, having been round to the stables to leave his horse there. He was a tall, fine man, with light curling hair, mild blue eyes, and a fair countenance pleasant to look at in its honest simplicity. George delivered the message left by Mr. Chattaway.

"He left me that message, did he?" cried Mr. Ryle, who, if he could be angered by one thing, it was on this very subject—Chattaway's claims against him. "He might have kept it in until he saw me himself."

"He bade me tell you, papa."

"Yes; it is no matter to Chattaway how he browbeats me and exposes my affairs. He has been at it for years. Has he gone home?"

"I think so," replied George. "He rode that way."

"I'll stand it no longer, and I'll tell him so to his face," continued Mr. Ryle. "Let him do his best and his worst."

Taking up his hat, Mr. Ryle strode out of the house, disdaining Nora's invitation to tea, and leaving on the table his neck-scarf, a large square of soft scarlet merino, which he had

worn into Barmester. Recently suffering from sore throat, Mrs. Ryle had induced him to put it on when he rode out that afternoon.

"Look there!" cried Nora. "He has left his cravat."

Snatching it up, she ran after Mr. Ryle, catching him when he was half-way down the path. He took it from her with a hasty movement, and went along swinging it in his hand. But he did not attempt to put it on.

"It is just like the master," grumbled Nora to George. "He has had that warm woollen thing on for hours, and now goes off without it! He'll get his throat bad again."

"I am afraid," said George, "papa's gone to have it out with Mr. Chattaway."

"And serve Chattaway right if he is," returned Nora. "It is what the master has threatened this many a day."

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLE IN THE PATH.

LATER, when George was working assiduously at his lessons and Nora was sewing, both by the help of the same candle—for an array of candles was not more common than other luxuries in Mr. Ryle's house—footsteps were heard approaching the porch, and a modest knock came to the door.

"Come in," called out Nora.

A very thin woman, in a washed-out cotton gown, with a thin face and inflamed eyes, came in, curtseying. It was an honest face, a meek face; although it looked as if its owner had a meal about once a week.

"Evening, Miss Dickson; evening, Master George. I have stepped round to ask the missis whether I shall be wanted on Tuesday."

"The missis is out," said Nora. "She has been talking of putting off the wash till the week after, but I don't know that she will. If you sit down a bit, Ann Canham, maybe she'll be in."

Ann Canham seated herself respectfully on the edge of a remote chair. And Nora, who liked gossiping above every earthly thing, began to talk of Jim Sanders's illness.

"He has dreadful bouts, poor fellow!" observed Ann Canham.

"But six times out of the seven he brings them on through his own fault," tartly returned Nora. "Many and many a time I have told him he'd do for himself, and now I think he has done it. This bout, it strikes me, is his last."

"Is he so ill as that?" exclaimed Ann Canham. And George looked up from his exercise-book in surprise.

"I don't know that he is," said Nora; "but——"

Nora broke suddenly off. She dropped her work, and bent her head towards Ann Canham in the distance.

"We have had a strange thing happen here, Ann Canham," she continued, her voice falling to a whisper; "and if it's not a warning of death, never you believe me again. This morning—— George, did you hear the dog in the night?"

"No," answered George.

"Boys sleep sound," she remarked to Ann Canham. "You might drive a coach-and-six through their room, and not wake them. His chamber's back, too. Last night the dog got round to the front of the house," she continued, "and there he was, all night long, sighing and moaning like a human creature. You couldn't call it a howl; it had too much pain in it. He was at it all night long; I couldn't sleep for it. The missis says she couldn't sleep for it. Molly heard it at times, but dropped off to sleep again; those hard-worked servants are heavy sleepers. Well, this morning I was up first, the master next, Molly next; but the master, he went out by the back-way, and saw nothing. By-and-by, I spied something out of this window on the garden path, as if somebody had been digging there; so I went out. Ann Canham, it was for all the world like a grave!—a great hole, with the earth thrown up on either side of it. That dog had done it in the night!"

Ann Canham, possibly feeling herself uncomfortably aloof from the company when graves became the topic, drew her chair nearer the table. George sat, his pen arrested; his large eyes, wide open, were turned on Nora—not with a gaze of fear, but with one of merriment.

"A great big hole, about twice the length of our rolling-pin, and wide in proportion, all hollowed and scratched out," went on Nora. "I called the cow-boy, and asked him what it looked like. 'A grave,' says he, without a minute's hesitation. Molly came out, and they two filled it in again, and trod the path down. The marks have been plain enough all day. The master

has been talking a long while of having that path gravelled, but it has not been done."

"And the hole was scratted by the dog?" proceeded Ann Canham, unable to get over the wonder.

"It was scratted by the dog," answered Nora, using the same phraseology in her earnestness. "And everybody knows what it's a sign of—that there's death coming to the house, or to somebody belonging to the house. Whether it's your own dog that scratches it, or whether it's somebody else's dog comes and scratches it, no matter; when a hole is made in that manner it's a sure and certain sign that a real grave is about to be dug. It may not happen once in fifty years—no, not in a hundred; but when it does come, it's a warning not to be neglected."

"It's odd how the dogs can know!" remarked Ann Canham, meekly.

"Those dumb animals have an instinct within them that we can't understand," said Nora. "We have had that dog ever so many years, and he never did such a thing before. Rely upon it, it's Jim Sanders's warning. How you stare, George!"

"Well I may stare, to hear you," was George's answer. "How can you put faith in such rubbish, Nora?"

"Just hark at him!" exclaimed Nora to Ann Canham. "Boys are half heathens. I'd not laugh in that irreverent way, if I were you, George, because Jim Sanders's time is come."

"I am not laughing at that," said George; "I am laughing at you. Nora, your argument won't hold water. If the dog had meant to give notice that he was digging a hole for Jim Sanders, he would have dug it before his own door, not before ours."

"Go on! go on!" cried Nora, sarcastically. "There's no profit arguing with disbelieving boys. They'd stand it out to your face that the sun never shone."

Ann Canham rose from her chair, and put it back in its place with much humility. Indeed, humility was her chief characteristic. "I'll come round in the morning, and know about the wash, if you please, ma'am," she said to Nora. "Father, he'll be wanting his supper, and will wonder where I'm a-staying."

She departed. Nora gave George a lecture upon disbelief and irreverence in general, but George was too busy with his books to take much notice of it.

The evening went on. Mrs. Ryle and Trevlyn returned,

the latter a diminutive boy, with dark curls and a handsome face.

"Jim Sanders is much better," remarked Mrs. Ryle.

"He is all right again now, and will be at work in a day or two. It must have been a sort of fainting-fit he had this afternoon, and his wife got frightened. I told him to rest to-morrow, and come up the next day, if he felt strong enough."

George turned to Nora, his eyes dancing, "What of the hole now?" he asked.

"Wait and see," snapped Nora. "And if you are impertinent, George, I'll never save you pie or pudding again."

Mrs. Ryle went into the sitting-room, but came back speedily, when she found it dark and untenanted. "Where's the master?" she exclaimed. "Surely he is home from Barmester!"

"Papa has been home ages ago," said George. "He's gone up to the Hold."

"Up to the Hold;" repeated Mrs. Ryle in surprise, for there was something like deadly feud between Trevlyn Hold and Trevlyn Farm.

George explained; telling of Mr. Chattaway's message, and the subsequent proceedings upon it. Nora added her word, that "as sure as fate, he was having it out with Chattaway." Nothing else would keep him at Trevlyn Hold.

But Mrs. Ryle knew that her husband, meek-spirited, easy-natured, was not one to "have it out" with any one, even with his enemy Chattaway. He might say a few words, but it was all he would say, and the interview would be sure to end almost as soon as begun. She took off her things, and Molly carried the supper-tray into the parlour.

But still there was no Mr. Ryle. Ten o'clock struck, and Mrs. Ryle grew, not exactly uneasy, but curious as to what could have become of him. What *could* he be stopping at the Hold for?

"It wouldn't surprise me to hear that his throat has been taken so bad he can't come back," said Nora. "Closing up, or something. He unwound his scarlet cravat from his neck, and went away swinging it in his hand. There's John Pinder waiting all this while in the kitchen."

"Have you finished your lessons, George?" asked Mrs. Ryle, perceiving that he was putting his books away.

"Every one," answered George.

"Then you shall go up to the Hold, and walk home with your papa. I cannot think what can be detaining him."

"Perhaps he has gone somewhere else?" said George.

"No," said Mrs. Ryle. "He would neither go anywhere else, nor, I think, stop at Chattaway's. This is Tuesday evening."

A conclusive argument. Tuesday evening was invariably devoted by Mr. Ryle to his farm accounts, and he never suffered anything to interfere with that evening's work. George threw his cap on his head, and started on his errand.

It was a starlight night, cold and clear, and George went along whistling. A quarter-of-an-hour's walk along the turnpike road brought him to Trevlyn Hold. The road rose gently the whole way, for the land was higher at Trevlyn Hold than at Trevlyn Farm. A white gate, by the side of a lodge, opened to the shrubbery or avenue—a dark walk, wide enough for two carriages to pass abreast, with the elm trees nearly meeting overhead. The shrubbery wound up to a lawn, which stretched before the windows of the house: an old-fashioned, commodious stone-built house, with gable roofs, and a handsome flight of steps before the entrance-hall. George ascended the steps and rang the bell.

"Is papa ready to come home?" he asked, not very ceremoniously, of the servant who answered it.

The man paused, as though he scarcely understood. "Mr. Ryle is not here, sir," was the answer.

"How long has he been gone?" resumed George.

"He has not been here at all, sir, that I know of. I don't think he has."

"Just ask, will you?" said George. "He came here to see Mr. Chattaway. It was about five o'clock."

The man went away and came back again. "Mr. Ryle has not been here, sir. I thought he had not."

George wondered. Could he be out somewhere with Chattaway? "Is Mr. Chattaway at home?" he inquired.

"Master is in bed," said the servant. "He came home today about five, or thereabouts, not feeling well, and he went to bed as soon as tea was over."

George turned away. Where could his father have gone to, if not to Mr. Chattaway's? Where was he to look for him? As he passed the lodge, Ann Canham was locking the gate, of which she and her father were the keepers. It was a whim of Mr. Chattaway's that the large gate should be locked at night; but not until after ten. Foot-passengers could go in by the small side-gate.

"Have you seen my father anywhere, since you left our house this evening?" he asked.

"No, I have not, Master George."

"I can't think where he can be. I thought he was at Chattaway's, but they say he has not been there."

"At Chattaway's! He'd not go there, would he, Master George?"

"He started to go there this afternoon. It's very odd where he can be! Good night, Ann Canham."

"Master George," she interrupted, "do you happen to have heard how it's going with Jim Sanders?"

"Oh, he is better," said George.

"Better!" slowly repeated Ann Canham. "Well, I hope he is," she added, in tones of doubt. "But, Master George, I didn't like what Nora told us. I can't bear them tokens from dumb animals. I never knew them fail."

"Jim Sanders is all right, I tell you," said heathen George. "Mamma has been there, and he is coming to his work the day after to-morrow. "Good night."

"Good night, sir," answered Ann Canham, in her usual humble fashion, as she retreated within the lodge. And George went through the gate, and stood there in hesitation, looking up and down the road. But it was apparently of no use to go elsewhere in the uncertainty; and he turned towards home, wondering much.

What had become of Mr. Ryle?

CHAPTER III.

CHATTAWAY'S BULL.

The stars shone bright and clear as George Ryle walked down the slight descent of the turnpike-road, wondering what had become of his father. Any other night but this, Tuesday, he might not have wondered about it; but George could not remember the time when Tuesday evening had been devoted to anything but the farm accounts. John Pinder, who acted as a sort of bailiff, had been in the kitchen some hours with his weekly memoranda, to go through them as usual with his master; and George knew that his father would not willingly keep the man waiting.

George went along whistling a tune; he was fond of whistling. About half-way between Trevlyn Hold and his own house, the sound of some other tune being whistled struck upon his ear. A turn in the road brought a lad into view, wearing a smock-frock. It was the waggoner's boy at Trevlyn Hold. He ceased when he came up to George, and touched his hat in rustic fashion.

"Have you seen anything of my father, Bill?"

"Not since this afternoon, Master George," was the answer. "I see him then. He was a-turning into that there field of ourn, just above here, next to where the bull be. A-going up to the Hold, mayhap; else what should he a-do there?"

"What time was that?" asked George.

The boy tilted his hat and considered a moment. "'Twas afore the sun setted," said he, at length, "I am sure o' that. He had some'at red in his hand, and the sun gloamed on it enough to set one's eyes a-dazzling."

The boy went on his way; George stood and thought. If his father had turned into the field indicated, there could be no doubt that he was hastening to Mr. Chattaway's. Crossing this field and the one next to it, both of them large, would bring a passenger close to Trevlyn Hold, cutting off, perhaps, two minutes of the high-road, which wound round the fields. But the fields were scarcely ever favoured, on account of the bull. This bull had been a subject of much contention in the neighbourhood, and was popularly called "Chattaway's bull." It was a savage animal, and had once got out of the field and frightened several people almost to death. The neighbours said Mr. Chattaway ought to keep it under lock and key. Mr. Chattaway said he should keep it where he pleased: and he generally pleased to keep it in the field. This barred it to pedestrians; and Mr. Ryle must undoubtedly have been in hot haste to reach Trevlyn Hold to choose that dangerous route.

A hundred fears darted through George Ryle's mind. He was more thoughtful, it may be said more imaginative, than boys of his age generally are. George and Cris Chattaway had once had a run from the bull, and only saved themselves by desperate speed. Venturing into the field one day when the animal was apparently grazing quietly in a remote corner, they had not anticipated his running at them. George remembered this; he remembered the terror excited when the bull had broken loose. Had his father been attacked by the bull? —perhaps killed by it?

His heart beating, George retraced his steps, and turned into the first field. He hastened across it, glancing keenly on all sides—as keenly, at least, as the night allowed him. Not in this field would be the danger, since it was interdicted to the bull; and George reached the gate of the other, and stood looking into it.

Apparently it was quite empty. The bull was probably safe in its shed then, in Chattaway's farmyard. George could see nothing—nothing except the grass stretched out in the starlight. He threw his eyes in every direction, but could not perceive his father, or any trace of him. "What a simpleton I am," thought George, "to fear that such an out-of-the-way thing could have happened! Papa must——"

What was that? George abruptly concluded his sentence, and held his breath. A sound, not unlike a groan, had smote upon his ear. And there it came again! "Holloa!" shouted George, and cleared the gate with a bound. "What's that? Who is it?"

A moan answered him; and George Ryle, guided by the sound, hastened to the spot. It was only a little way off, along by the hedge separating the fields. All the undefined fear, which George, not a minute ago, had felt inclined to treat as groundless, was indeed but a prevision of the terrible reality. Mr. Ryle lay in a narrow, dry ditch: and, but for that friendly ditch, he had probably been gored to death on the spot.

"Who is it?" he asked feebly, as his son bent over him, trying to distinguish what he could in the darkness. "George?"

"Oh, papa! what has happened?"

"Just my death, lad."

It was a sad tale. One that is often talked of in the place, in connection with Chattaway's bull. In crossing the second field—indeed, as soon as he entered it—Mr. Ryle was attacked by the furious beast, and tossed into the ditch, where he lay helpless. The people said then, and say still, that the scarlet cravat he carried excited the anger of the bull.

George raised his voice in a loud shout for help, hoping it might reach the ears of the boy whom he had recently encountered. "Perhaps I can get you out, papa," he said. "Though I may not be able myself to get you home."

"No, George; it will take stronger help than yours to get me out of this."

"I had better go up to the Hold, then. It is nearer than our house."

"George, you will not go to the Hold," said Mr. Ryle, authoritatively. "I will not be beholden for help to Chattaway. He has been the ruin of my peace, and now his bull has done for me."

George bent down closer. There was no room for him to get into the ditch; it was very narrow. "Papa, are you shivering with cold?"

"With cold and pain. The frost strikes keen upon me, and my pain is great."

George instantly took off his jacket and waistcoat, and laid them gently on his father, his tears dropping silently in the dark night. "I'll go home for help," he said, speaking as bravely as he could. "John Pinder is there, and we can call up one or two of the men."

"Ay, do," said Mr. Ryle. "They must bring a shutter, and carry me home on it. Take care you don't frighten your mamma, George. Tell her at first that I am a little hurt, and can't walk home; break it to her so that she may not be alarmed."

George flew away. At the end of the second field, staring over the gate near the high-road, stood the boy, Bill, whose ears George's shouts had reached. He was not a very sharp-witted lad, and his eyes and mouth opened with astonishment to see George Ryle come flying along in his shirt-sleeves.

"What's a-gate?" asked he. "Be that there bull got loose again?"

"Bill, run down for your life to the second field," panted George, seizing him in his desperation. "In the ditch, a few yards along the hedge to the right, my father is lying. Go and stop by him, until I come back with help."

"Lying in the ditch!" repeated Bill, unable to gather his ideas upon the communication. "What's a-done it, Master George? Drink?"

"Drink!" indignantly retorted George. "When did you know Mr. Ryle the worse for drink? It's Chattaway's bull; that's what has done it. Make haste down to him, Bill. You might hear his groans all this way if you listened."

"Is the bull there?" asked Bill.

"I have seen no bull. The bull must have been in its shed hours ago. Stand by him, Bill, and I'll give you sixpence to-morrow."

They separated. George tore down the road, wondering how he should fulfil the injunction of his father not to frighten

Mrs. Ryle in telling the news. Molly, very probably looking after her sweetheart, was standing at the fold-yard gate as he passed it. George made her go into the house the front way and whisper to Nora to come out; to tell her that "somebody" wanted to speak to her. Molly, a good-natured girl, obeyed; but so bunglingly did she execute her commission, that not only Nora, but Mrs. Ryle and Trevlyn came flocking to the porch. George could only go in then.

"Don't be frightened, mamma," he said, in answer to their questions, "Papa has had a fall, and—and says he cannot walk home. Perhaps his ankle's sprained."

"What has become of your jacket and waistcoat, you naughty boy?" cried Nora, laying hold of George as if she meant to shake him.

"Don't, Nora. They are safe enough. Is John Pinder still in the kitchen?" continued George, escaping from the room.

Trevlyn ran after him. "I say, George, have you been fighting?" he asked. "Is your jacket torn to ribbons?"

George drew the boy into a dark angle of the passage. "Treve," he whispered, "if I tell you something about papa, you won't cry out?"

"No, I won't cry out," answered Treve.

"We must get a stretcher of some sort up to him, to bring him home. I am going to consult John Pinder."

"Where is papa?" interrupted Treve.

"He is lying in a ditch in the large meadow. Chattaway's bull has attacked him. I am not sure but he will die."

The first thing Treve did *was* to cry out. George clapped his hand before his mouth. But Mrs. Ryle and Nora, who were full of curiosity, both as to George's jacketless state and George's news, had followed them into the passage. Treve began to cry.

"He has got dreadful news about papa, he says," sobbed Treve. "He thinks he's dead."

It was all over. George must tell now, and he could not help himself. "No, no, Treve, you should not exaggerate," he said, turning to Mrs. Ryle in his pain and earnestness. "There is an accident, mamma; but it is not so bad as that."

Mrs. Ryle retained perfect composure; very few people had ever seen *her* ruffled. It was not in her nature to be so, and her husband had little need to caution George as he had done. She laid her hand upon George's shoulder and looked calmly into

his face. "Tell me the truth," she said in tones of quiet command. "What is the injury?"

"I do not know yet——"

"The truth, boy, I said," she sternly interposed.

"Indeed, mamma, I do not yet know what it is. He has been attacked by Chattaway's bull."

It was Nora's turn now to shriek. "By Chattaway's bull?" she uttered.

"Yes," said George. "It must have happened immediately after he left here at tea-time, and he has been lying ever since in the ditch in the upper meadow. I covered him over with my jacket and waistcoat; he was shivering with cold and pain."

While George was talking, Mrs. Ryle was acting. She sought John Pinder and issued her orders clearly and concisely. Men were got together; a mattress with holders was made ready; and the procession started under the convoy of George, who had been made to put on another jacket by Nora. Bill, the waggoner's boy, had been faithful, and was found by the side of Mr. Ryle.

"I'm glad you be come," was the boy's salutation. "He have been groaning and shivering awful. It set me on to shiver too."

As if to escape from the evil, Bill ran off, there and then, across the field, and never drew breath until he reached Trevlyn Hold. In spite of his somewhat stolid properties, he felt a sort of pride in being the first to impart the story there. Entering the house by the back, or farmyard door—for farming was carried on at Trevlyn Hold as well as at Trevlyn Farm—he passed through sundry passages to the well-lighted hall. There he seemed to hesitate at his temerity, but at length gave an awkward knock at the door of the general sitting-room.

A large, handsome room. Reclining in an easy-chair was a pretty and pleasing woman, looking considerably younger than she really was. Small features, a profusion of curling auburn hair, light blue eyes, a soft, yielding expression of countenance, and a gentle voice, were the adjuncts of a young woman, rather than of one approaching middle-age. A stranger, entering, might have taken her for a young unmarried woman; and yet she was mistress of Trevlyn Hold, the mother of that great girl of sixteen at the table, now playing backgammon and quarrelling with her brother Christopher. Mistress in name only. Although the wife of its master, Mr. Chattaway, and the daughter of its late master, Squire Trevlyn; although uni-

versally called *Madam* Chattaway—as from time immemorial it had been customary to designate the mistress of Trevlyn Hold—she was in fact no better than a nonentity in it, possessing little authority, and assuming less. She has been telling her children several times that their hour for bed has passed; she has begged them not to quarrel; she has suggested that if they will not go to bed, Maude should do so; but she may as well talk to the winds.

Miss Chattaway possesses a will of her own. She has the same insignificant features, the pale leaden complexion, the small, sly, keen light eyes that characterize her father. She would like to hold undisputed sway as the house's mistress; but the inclination has to be concealed; for the real mistress of Trevlyn Hold may not be displaced from power. She is sitting in the background, at a table apart, bending over her desk. A tall, majestic lady, in a stiff green silk dress and an imposing cap, in person very like Mrs. Ryle. It is Miss Trevlyn, usually called Miss Diana, the youngest daughter of the late Squire. You would take her to be at least ten years older than her sister, Mrs. Chattaway, but in point of fact she is that lady's junior by a year. Miss Trevlyn is, to all intents and purposes, mistress of Trevlyn Hold, and she rules its internal economy with a firm sway.

"Maude, you should go to bed," Mrs. Chattaway had said for the fourth or fifth time.

A graceful girl of thirteen turned her dark, violet-blue eyes and her pretty light curls upon Mrs. Chattaway. She had been leaning on the table watching the backgammon. Something of the soft, sweet expression visible in Mrs. Chattaway's face might be traced in this child's: but in Maude it was blended with greater intellect.

"It is not my fault, Aunt Edith," she gently said. "I should like to go. I am tired."

"Will you be quiet, Maude!" broke from Miss Chattaway. "Mamma, I wish you wouldn't be so tiresome, worrying about bed! I don't choose Maude to go up until I go. She helps me to undress."

Poor Maude looked sleepy. "I can be going on, Octave," she said to Miss Chattaway.

"You can hold your tongue and wait where you are, and not be ungrateful," was the response of Octavia Chattaway. "But for papa's kindness, you would not have a bed to go to. Cris, you are cheating! that was not sixes!"

It was at this juncture that the awkward knock came to the door. "Come in!" called out Mrs. Chattaway.

Either her gentle voice was not heard, for Cris and his sister were disputing just then, or the boy's modesty would not allow him to respond. He knocked again.

"See who it is, Cris," came forth the ringing voice of Miss Trevlyn.

Cris did not choose to obey. "Open the door, Maude," said he.

Maude did as she was bid: she had little chance allowed her in that house of doing otherwise. Opening the door, she saw the boy standing there. "What is it, Bill?" she asked in surprise.

"Please, is the Squire in there, Miss Maude?"

"No," answered Maude. "He has gone to bed: he is not well."

This appeared to be a poser for Bill, and he stood considering. "Is Madam in there?" he presently asked.

"Who is it, Maude?" came again in Miss Trevlyn's commanding tones.

Maude turned her head. "It is Bill Webb, Aunt Diana."

"What does he want?"

Bill stepped in. "Please, Miss Diana, I came to tell the Squire the news. I thought he might be angry of me if I did not, seeing as I knowed of it."

"The news?" repeated Miss Diana, looking imperiously at Bill.

"The mischief what the bull have done. He have gone and gored Farmer Ryle."

The words arrested the attention of all. They came forward, as with one impulse. Cris and his sister, in their haste, upset the backgammon-board.

"*What* do you say, Bill?" gasped Mrs. Chattaway, with white face and faltering tongue.

"It's true, ma'am," said Bill. "The bull set on him this afternoon, and tossed him into the ditch. Master George found him there a short while a-gone, groaning awful."

There was a startled pause. Maude broke the silence with a sob of pain, and Mrs. Chattaway, in her consternation, seized the arm of the boy. "Bill, I—I—hope he is not much injured!"

"He says as it's his death, ma'am," answered Bill. "John Pinder and others have brought a bed, and they be carrying of him home on it."

"What brought Mr. Ryle in that field?" asked Miss Diana.

"He telled me, ma'am, as he was a-coming up here to see the Squire, and took that way to save time."

Mrs. Chattaway fell back a little. "Cris," said she to her son, "go down to the farm and see what the injury is. I cannot sleep in the uncertainty. It may be fatal."

Cris tossed his head. "You know, mother, I'd do almost anything to oblige you," he said, in his smooth accent, which seemed to carry a false sound with it, "but I can't go to the farm. Mrs. Ryle might insult me: there's no love lost between us."

"If the accident happened this afternoon, how was it that it was not discovered when the bull was brought in from the field to his shed to-night?" cried Miss Trevlyn, speaking as much to herself as to any one else.

Bill shook his head. "I dun know," he replied. "For one thing, Mr. Ryle was right down in the ditch, and couldn't be seen. And the bull, maybe, had went to the top o' the field then, Miss Diana, where the groaning wouldn't be heard."

"If I had only been listened to!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, in wailing accents. "How many a time have I asked that the bull should be parted with, before he did some fatal injury. And now it has come!"

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE OR DEATH?

Mr. Ryle was carried home on the mattress, and laid on the large table in the sitting-room, by the surgeon's directions. Mrs. Ryle, clear-headed, and of calm judgment, had sent for medical advice even before sending for her husband. The only doctor available for immediate purposes was Mr. King, who lived about half-way between the farm and the village. He attended at once, and was at the house before his patient. Mrs. Ryle had sent also to Barmester for another surgeon, but he could not arrive just yet. It was by Mr. King's direction that the mattress was placed on the large table in the parlour.

"Better there; better there," acquiesced the sufferer, when he heard the order given. "I don't know how they'd get me up the stairs."

Mr. King, a man getting in years, was left alone with his patient. The examination over, he came forth from the room and sought Mrs. Ryle, who was waiting for the report.

"The internal injuries are extensive, I fear," he said. "They lie chiefly here"—touching his chest and right side.

"Will he *live*, Mr. King?" she interrupted. "Do not temporize, but let me know the truth. Will he live?"

"You have asked me a question that I cannot yet answer," returned the surgeon. "My examination has been hasty and superficial: I was alone, and I knew you were anxiously waiting. With the help of Mr. Benage, we may be able to arrive at some more decisive opinion. I fear the injuries are serious."

Yes, they were serious; and nothing could be done, as it seemed, to remedy them or alleviate the pain. Mr. Ryle lay helpless on the bed, giving vent to his regret and anguish in somewhat homely phraseology. It was the phraseology of this simple farmhouse; that to which he had been accustomed; and he was not likely to change it now. Gentlemen by descent, he and his father had been content to live as plain farmers only, in speech as well as in work.

He lay groaning, lamenting his imprudence, now that it was too late, in venturing within the reach of that dangerous animal. The rest waited anxiously and restlessly the appearance of the surgeon. For Mr. Benage of Barmester had a world-wide reputation, and such men seem to bring consolation with them. If any one could apply healing remedies to the injuries and save his life, it was Mr. Benage.

George Ryle had taken up his station at the garden gate. His hands clasped, his head lying lightly upon them, he was listening for the sound of the gig which had been despatched to Barmester. Nora at length came out to him.

"You'll catch cold, George, stopping there in the keen night air."

"The air won't hurt me to-night. Listen, Nora! I thought I heard something. They might be back again by this."

He was right. The gig was bowling swiftly along, containing the well-known surgeon and the messenger despatched for him. The surgeon, a little man, quick and active, was out of the gig before it had well stopped, passed George and Nora with a nod, and entered the house.

A short time and the worst was known. There would be but a few more hours of life for Mr. Ryle.

Mr. King would remain, doing what he could to comfort, to

soothe pain. Mr. Benage must return to Barmester, for he was wanted there; and the horse was put to the gig to take him back again. Refreshment was offered him, but he declined it. Nora waylaid him in the garden as he was going down, and caught him by the arm.

"Will the master see to-morrow's sun, sir?"

"It's rising, he may. He will not see its setting."

Can you picture to yourselves what that night was for the house and its inmates? In the parlour, gathered round the table on which lay the dying man, were Mrs. Ryle, George and Trevlyn, the surgeon, and sometimes Nora. In the outer room was collected a larger group: John Pinder, the men who had borne him home, and Molly; with a few others whom the news of the accident had brought together.

Mrs. Ryle stood near her husband. George and Trevlyn seemed scarcely to know where to stand, or what to do with themselves; and Mr. King sat in a chair in the recess of the bay window. They had placed a pillow under Mr. Ryle's head, and covered him with blankets and a counterpane; a stranger would have thought him lying on a bed. He looked grievously wan, and the surgeon administered something in a glass from time to time.

"Come here, my boys," he suddenly said. "Come close to me."

They approached, as he said, and leaned over him. He took a hand of each. George swallowed down his tears in the best way that he could. Trevlyn looked scared and frightened.

"Children, I am going. It has pleased God to cut me off in the midst of my career, just when I had least thought of death. I don't know how it will be with you, my dear ones, or how it will be with the old home. Chattaway can sell up everything if he chooses; and I fear there's little hope but he'll do it. If he would let your mother stop on, she might keep things together, and get clear of him in time. George will be growing up more of a man every day, and he may soon learn to be useful in the farm, if his mother thinks well to trust him. Maude, you'll do your best for them? For him, as for the younger ones?"

"I will," said Mrs. Ryle.

"Ay, I know you will. I leave them all to you, and you will act for the best. I think it's well that George should be upon the farm, as I am taken from it; but you and he will see to that. Treve, you must do the best you can in whatever

station you may be called to. I don't know what it will be. My boys, there's nothing before you but work. Do you understand that?"

"Fully," was George's answer. Treve seemed too bewildered to give one.

"To work with all your might; your shoulders to the wheel. Do your best in all ways. Be honest and single-hearted in the sight of God; work for Him whilst you are working for yourselves, and then He will prosper you. I wish I had worked for Him more than I have done!"

A pause, broken only by George, who could no longer control his sobs.

"My days seem to have been made up of nothing but struggling, and quarrelling, and care. Struggling to keep my head above water, and quarrelling with Chattaway. The end seemed far-off, ages away, something as heaven seems. And now the end's come, and heaven's come—that is, I must set out upon the journey that leads to it. I misdoubt me but the end comes to many as suddenly; cutting them off in their carelessness, and their sins. Do not spend your days in quarrelling, my boys; be working on a bit for the end whilst time is given you to do it. I don't know how it will be in the world I am about to enter. Some fancy that when once we have entered it, we shall see what is going on here, in our families and homes. For that thought, if for no other, I would ask you to try and keep right. If you were to go wrong, think how it would grieve me! I should always be saying that I might have trained you better, and had not done so. Oh, children! it is only when we come to lie here that we see all our shortcomings. You would not like to grieve me, George?"

"Oh, papa, no!" said George, his sobs deepening. "Indeed I will try to do my best. I shall be always thinking that perhaps you are watching me."

"There's One greater than I always watching you, George. And that is God. Act well in His sight; not in mine. Doctor, I must have some more of that stuff again. I feel a queer sinking."

Mr. King rose, poured some drops into a wine-glass of water, and administered them. The patient lay a few moments, and then took his sons' hands, as before.

"And now, children, for my last charge to you. Reverence and love your mother. Obey her in all things. George, she is not your own mother, but you have never known another,

and she has been as one to you. Listen to her always, and she will lead you aright. If I had listened to her, I shouldn't be lying where I am now. A week or two ago I wanted the character of that outdoor man from Chattaway. 'Don't go through the field with the bull in it,' she said to me before I started. 'Better keep where he *can't* touch you.' Do you remember it, Maude?"

Mrs. Ryle simply bowed her head in reply. She was feeling the scene deeply, but emotion she would not show.

"I heeded what your mother said, and went up to Chattaway's by the roadway, avoiding the fields," resumed Mr. Ryle. "This last afternoon, when I was going up again and had got to the field gate, I turned to it, for it cut off a few steps, and my temper was up. I thought of what your mother would say, as I swung in, but I didn't let it stop me. It must have been that red neckerchief that put him up, for I was no sooner over the gate than he bellowed savagely and butted at me. It was all over in a minute; I was in the ditch, and he went on, bellowing and tossing and tearing at the cloth. If you go there to-morrow, you'll see it in shreds about the field. Children, obey your mother; there'll be double the necessity for it when I am gone."

The boys had been obedient hitherto. At least, George had been. Trevlyn was too much indulged to be perfectly so. George promised that he would be so still.

"I wish I could have seen the little wench," resumed the dying man, the tears gathering on his eyelashes. "But maybe it's for the best that she's away, for I should hardly have borne to part with her. Maude! George! Treve! I leave her to you all. Do the best you can by her. I don't know that she'll be spared to grow up, for she's a delicate little mite: but that will be as God pleases. I wish I could have stopped with you all a bit longer—if it's not sinful to wish contrary to God's will. Is Mr. King there?"

Mr. King had resumed his seat in the bay window, and was partially hidden by the curtain. He came forward. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Ryle?"

"I should be obliged if you'd just write out a few directions. I should like to write them myself, but it can't be; you'll put down the sentences just as I speak them. I have not made my will. I put it off, and put it off, thinking I could do it at any time; but now the end's come, and it is not done. Death surprises a great many, I fear, as he has surprised me. It

seems that if I could only have one day more of health, I would do many things that I have left undone. You shall write down my wishes, doctor. It will do as well; for there's only themselves, and they won't dispute one with the other. Let a little table be brought, and pen, ink, and paper."

He lay quiet while these directions were obeyed, and then began again.

"I am in very little pain, considering that I am going; not half as much as when I lay in that ditch. Thank God for it! It might have been that I could not have left a written line, or said a word of farewell to you. There's sure to be a bit of blue sky in the darkest trouble; and the more implicitly we trust, the more blue sky we shall find. I have not been what I ought to be, especially in the matter of disputing with Chattaway—not but what it's Chattaway's hardness that has been in fault. But God is taking me from a world of care, and I trust he will forgive all my shortcomings for our Saviour's sake. Is the table ready?"

"It is all ready," said Mr. King.

"Then leave me alone with the doctor a short time, dear ones," he resumed. "We shall not keep you out long."

Nora, who had brought in the things required, held the door open for them to pass through. The pinched look that the face, lying there, was assuming, struck upon her ominously.

"After all, the boy was right," she murmured. "The hole, scratched before this house, was not meant for Jim Sanders."

CHAPTER V.

LOOKING ON THE DEAD.

THE sun rose gloriously, dispersing the early October frost, and shedding its beams upon the world. But the beams fall upon dark scenes sometimes; perhaps more often than on bright ones.

George Ryle was leaning on the fold-yard gate. He had strolled out without his hat, and had bent his head down in his grief. Not that he was shedding tears now. He had shed plenty during the night; but tears cannot flow always, even from an aching heart.

Hasty steps were heard approaching down the road, and George raised his head. They were Mr. Chattaway's. He stopped suddenly at sight of George.

"George, what is this about your father? What has happened? Is he dead?"

"He is dying," replied George. "The doctors are with him. Mr. King has been here all night, and Mr. Benage has just come again from Barmester. They have sent us out of the room; me and Treve. They let mamma stop."

"But how on earth did it happen?" asked Mr. Chattaway. "I cannot make it out. The first thing I heard when I woke this morning, was, that Mr. Ryle had been gored to death by the bull. What brought him near the bull?"

"He was going through the field up to your house, and the bull set on him——"

"But when? when?" hastily interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

"It was yesterday afternoon. Papa came in directly after you rode away, and I gave him your message. He said he would go up then to the Hold, and speak to you; and he took the field way instead of the road."

"Now, how could he take it? He knew that way was hardly safe for strangers. Not but what the bull ought to have known him."

"He had a scarlet cravat in his hand, and he thinks it was that that excited the bull. He was tossed into the ditch, and lay there, undiscovered, until past ten at night."

"And he is badly hurt?"

"He is dying," replied George, "dying now. I think that is why they sent us from the room."

Mr. Chattaway paused in dismay. Though a hard, selfish man, who had taken delight in quarrelling with Mr. Ryle and putting upon him, he did possess some feelings of humanity as well as his neighbours; and the terrible nature of the case naturally called them forth. George strove manfully to keep down his tears; speaking of the circumstances was almost too much for him, but he did not care to give way before the world, especially before that unit in it represented by Mr. Chattaway. Mr. Chattaway rested his elbow on the gate, and looked down at George.

"This is very shocking, lad. I am sorry to hear it. Whatever will the farm do without him? How shall you all get on?"

"It is thinking of that which has been troubling him all

night," said George, speaking by snatches lest his sobs should burst forth. "He said we might get a living at the farm, if you would let us do it. If you would not be hard," added George, determined to speak out.

"Hard, he called me, did he?" said Mr. Chattaway. "It's not my hardness that has been in fault, George, but his pride. He has been as saucy and independent as if he did not owe a shilling; always making himself out my equal."

"He is your equal, Mr. Chattaway," said George, speaking meekly in his sadness.

"My equal! Working Tom Ryle equal with the Chattaways! A man who rents two or three hundred acres and does half the work on them himself, the equal of the landlord who owns them and ever so many more to them!—the equal of the Squire of Trevlyn Hold! Where did you pick up those notions, George Ryle?"

George had a great mind to say that in point of strict justice Mr. Chattaway had no more right to be Squire of Trevlyn Hold, or to own those acres, than his father had; not quite so much right, if it came to that. He had a great mind to say that the Ryles were gentlemen, and once owners of what his father only rented now. But George remembered they were in Chattaway's power; he could sell them up, and turn them off the farm, if he pleased; and he held his tongue.

"Not that I blame you for the notions," Mr. Chattaway resumed, in the same thin, unpleasant tones—never was there a voice more thin and wiry than his. "It's natural you should have got them from Ryle, for they were his. He was always—— But there! I won't say any more, with him lying there, poor fellow. We'll let it drop, George."

"I do not know how things are between you and my father," said George, "except that there's money owing to you. But if you will not press us, if you will let mamma stay on the farm, I——"

"That's enough," interrupted Mr. Chattaway. "Never trouble your head, George, about business that's above you. Anything that's between me and your father, or your mother either, is no concern of yours; you are not old enough for interference yet. I should like to see him. Do you think I may go in?"

"We can ask," answered George; some vague and indistinct idea floating to his mind that a death-bed reconciliation might help to smooth future difficulties.

He led the way through the fold-yard. Nora was coming out at the back-door as they advanced to it, her eyes wet.

"Nora, do you think Mr. Chattaway may go in to see my father?" asked George.

"If it will do Mr. Chattaway any good," responded Nora, who ever regarded that gentleman in the light of a common enemy, and could with difficulty bring herself to be commonly civil to him. "It's all over; but Mr. Chattaway can see what's left of him."

"Is he dead?" whispered Mr. Chattaway; while George lifted his white and startled face.

"Yes, he is dead!" broke forth Nora, in sobs; "and perhaps there may be some that will wish now they had been less hard with him in life. The doctors and Mrs. Ryle have just come out, and the women have gone in to put him straight and comfortable. Mr. Chattaway can go in also, if he'd like it."

Mr. Chattaway, it appeared, did not like it. He turned from the door, drawing George with him.

"George, tell your mother that I am grieved and vexed at her trouble, and I wish that beast of a bull had been stuck, before he had done what he has. Tell her that if there's any little thing she could fancy from the Hold, to let Edith know, and she'll gladly send it to her. Good-bye, lad. You and Treve must keep up, you know."

He passed out by the fold-yard gate, as he had entered, and George leaned upon it again with his aching heart; an orphan now. Treve and Caroline had their mother left, but he had no one. It is true he had never known a mother, and Mrs. Ryle, his father's second wife, had supplied the place of one. She had done her duty by him; but it had not been in love; not very much in gentleness. Of her own children she was inordinately fond; she had not been so of George—which perhaps was in accordance with human nature. It had never troubled George much; but somehow the fact now struck upon him with a sense of intense loneliness. His father had loved him deeply and sincerely; but—he was gone.

In spite of his heavy sorrow, George was awake to the sounds going on in the distance, the everyday labour of life. The cow-boy was calling to his cows; one of the men, acting for Jim Sanders, was going out with the team. And now there came a butcher, riding up from Barmester, and George knew he had come about some beasts, all unconscious that the master was

no longer here to command, or to deal with. Work, especially farm work, must go on, although death may have accomplished its mission.

The butcher, riding fast, had nearly reached the gate, and George was turning away from it to retire indoors, when the unhappy thought came upon him—Who is to see this man? His father no longer there, who must represent him?—must answer comers—must stand in his place? It brought the fact of what had happened more *practically* before George Ryle's mind than anything else had brought it. He stood where he was, instead of turning away. He must rise superior to his grief that day, and be useful; he must rise above his years in the future, for his step-mother's sake.

"Good morning, Mr. George," cried the butcher, as he rode up. "Is the master about?"

"No," answered George, speaking as steadily as he could. "He—he will never be about again. He is dead."

The butcher thought it a boy's joke. "None of that, young gentleman!" said he, with a laugh. "Which way shall I go to find him?"

"Mr. Cope," said George, raising his grave face—and its expression struck a chill to the man's heart—"I should not joke upon the subject of death. My father was attacked by Chattaway's bull yesterday evening, and has died of the injuries."

"Lawk a mercy!" uttered the startled man. "Attacked by Chattaway's bull! and—and—died of the injuries! Sure-ly it can't be!"

George had turned his face away; it was getting more than he could bear.

"Have Chattaway killed the bull?" was the next question put by the butcher.

"I suppose not."

"Then he is no man and no gentleman if he don't do it. If a beast of mine injured a neighbour, I'd stop him from injuring another, no matter what might be its value. Dear me! Mr. George, I'd rather have heard any news than this."

George's head was completely turned away now. The butcher roused himself to think of business. His time was short, for he had to be back again in the town before his shop opened for the day.

"I came up about the beasts," he said. "The master as good as sold 'em to me yesterday; it was only a matter of a few shillings split us. But I'll give in sooner than not have.

'em. Who is going to carry on the dealings in Mr. Ryle's place? Who can I speak to?"

"You can see John Pinder," answered George. "He knows most about things."

The butcher guided his horse through the fold-yard, scattering the cocks and hens in various directions, and gained the barn. John Pinder was in it, and came out to him; and George escaped indoors.

It was a sad day. The excitement over, the doctors departed, the gossipers and neighbours dispersed, the village carpenter having come and taken a certain measure, the house was left to its monotonous quiet; that distressing quiet which tells upon the spirits. Nora's voice was subdued, and Molly went about on tiptoe. The boys wished it was over; that, and many more days to come. Treve fairly broke bounds about twelve, said he could not bear it, and went out amongst the men. In the afternoon George was summoned upstairs to the chamber of Mrs. Ryle, where she had remained since the morning.

"George, you shall go to Barmester," she said. "I wish to know how Caroline bears the news, poor child! Mr. Benage said he would call and break it to her; but I cannot get her grief out of my head. You can go over in the gig; but don't stay. Be home by tea-time."

It is more than probable that George felt the commission as a relief, and he started as soon as the gig was ready. As he went out of the yard, Nora called after him to be careful how he drove. Not that he had never driven before; but Mr. Ryle, or some one else, had always been in the gig with him. Now he was alone; and it brought his loss again more forcibly before him.

He reached Barmester, and saw his sister Caroline, who was staying there on a visit. She was not overwhelmed with grief, but, on the contrary, appeared to have taken the matter coolly and lightly. The fact was, the little girl had no definite ideas on the subject of death. She had never been brought into contact with it, and could not at all realize the fact told her, that she would never see papa again. Better for the little heart perhaps that it was so; enough of sorrow comes with later years; and Mrs. Ryle may have judged wisely in deciding to keep the child where she was until after the funeral.

When George reached home, he found Nora at tea alone. Master Treve had chosen to take his with his mamma in her

chamber. George sat down with Nora. The shutters were closed, and the room was bright with fire and candle; but to George all things were dreary.

"Why don't you eat?" asked Nora, presently, perceiving that the bread-and-butter remained untouched.

"I'm not hungry," replied George.

"Not hungry? Did you have tea at Barmester?"

"I did not have anything," he said.

"Now, look you here, George. If you are going to give way to your grief—— Mercy me! What's that?"

Some one had come in hastily at the door. A lovely girl, in a flowing white evening dress, and blue ribbons in her hair. A heavy shawl, which she had worn on her shoulders, fell to the ground, and she stood panting, as one who has outrun her breath, her fair curls falling, her cheeks crimson, her dark blue eyes glistening. On the pretty arms were clasped coral bracelets, and a thin gold chain, bearing a coral cross, was on her neck. It was Maude Trevlyn, whom you saw at Trevlyn Hold last night. So out of place did she look in that scene, that Nora for once was silent. She could only stare.

"I ran away, Nora," said Maude, coming forward. "Octave has a party, but they won't miss me if I stay only a little time. I have wanted to come all day, but they would not let me."

"Who would not?" asked Nora.

"Not any of them. Even Aunt Edith. Nora, is it *true?* Is it true that he is dead?" she reiterated, her pretty hands clasped with emotion, and her great blue eyes cast upwards at Nora, waiting for the answer.

"Oh, Miss Maude! you might have heard it was true enough up at the Hold. And so they have a party, have they! Some folk in Madam Chattaway's place might have had the grace to put it off, when their sister's husband was lying dead!"

"It is not Aunt Edith's fault. You know it is not, Nora. George, you know it also. She has been crying several times to-day; and she asked long and long ago for the bull to be sent off. But he was not sent. Oh, George, I am so sorry! I wish I could have seen him before he died. There was no one I liked so well as Mr. Ryle."

"Will you have some tea?" asked Nora.

"No, I must not stay. Should Octave miss me she will tell of me, and then I should be punished. What do you think? Rupert displeased Cris in some way, and Miss Diana sent him to bed away from all the pleasure. It is a shame!"

"It is all a shame together, up at Trevlyn Hold—all that concerns Rupert," said Nora, not, perhaps, very judiciously.

"Nora, where did he die?" asked Maude, in a whisper. "Did they take him up to his bedroom when they brought him home?"

"They carried him in there," said Nora, pointing to the sitting-room door. "He is lying there now."

"Nora, I want to see him," she continued.

Nora received the intimation dubiously. "I don't know whether you had better," said she, after a pause.

"Yes, I must, Nora. What was that about the dog?" added Maude. "Did he scratch out a grave before the porch?"

"Who told you anything about that?" asked Nora, sharply.

"Ann Canham came and told it at the Hold. Was it so, Nora?"

Nora nodded. "A great hole, Miss Maude, nearly big enough to lay the master in. Not that I thought it was a token for *him!* I thought only of Jim Sanders. And some folk laugh at these warnings!" she added. "There sits one," pointing to George.

"Well, never mind it now, Nora," said George, hastily. Never was a boy less given to superstition; but, somehow, with his father lying where he was, he did not care to hear much about the mysterious hole.

Maude moved towards the door. "Take me in to see him, Nora," she pleaded.

"Will you promise not to be frightened?" asked Nora. "Some young people can't endure the sight of a dead person."

"Why should I be frightened?" returned Maude. "He cannot hurt me."

Nora rose in acquiescence, and took up the candle. But George laid his hand on the girl.

"Don't go, Maude. Nora, you must not let her go in. She might not like it. It would not be right."

Now, of all things, Nora had a dislike to be dictated to, especially by those she called children. She saw no reason why Maude should not look upon the dead if she wished to do so, and she gave a sharp word of reprimand to George, all in an undertone. How could they speak aloud, entering into that presence?

"Maude, Maude!" he whispered. "I would advise you not to go in."

"Let me go, George!" she pleaded. "I should like to see

him once again. I did not see him for a whole week before he died. The last time I ever saw him was one day in the copse, and he got down some hazel-nuts for me. I never thanked him," she added, the tears in her eyes; "I was in a hurry to get home, and I never stayed to thank him. I shall always be sorry for it. I must see him, George."

Nora was already in the room with the candle. Maude advanced on tip-toe, her heart beating, her breath held with awe. She halted at the foot of the table, looked eagerly upwards, and saw—— What was it that she saw?

A white, ghastly face, cold and still, with its white bands tied up round it, and its closed eyes. Maude Trevlyn had never seen the dead, and her heart gave a bound of terror, and she fell back with a convulsive shriek. Before Nora knew well what had occurred, George had her in the other room, his arms wound about her with a sense of protection. Nora came out and closed the door, vexed with herself for having allowed her to enter.

"You should have told me you had never seen anybody dead before, Miss Maude," cried she, testily. "How was I to know? And you ought to have come right up to the top before you turned your eyes on it. Of course, glancing up from the foot, they looked bad."

Maude was clinging tremblingly to George, sobbing hysterically. "Don't be angry with me," she whispered. "I did not think he would look like that."

"Oh, Maude, dear, I am not angry; I am only sorry," he said soothingly. "There's nothing really to be frightened at. Papa loved you very much; almost as much as he loved me."

"I will take you back, Maude," said George, when she was ready to go.

"Yes, please," she eagerly answered. "I should not dare to go alone now. I should be fancying I saw—you know. That it was looking out at me from the hedges."

Nora folded her shawl well over her again, and George drew her closer to him that she might feel his presence as well as see it. Nora watched them down the path, right over the hole which the restless dog had favoured the house with a night or two before.

They went up the road. An involuntary shudder shook George's frame as he passed the turning which led to the fatal field. He seemed to see his father in the unequal conflict. Maude felt the movement.

"It is never going to be out again, George," she whispered.

"What?" he asked, his thoughts buried deeply just then.

"The bull. I heard Aunt Diana talking to Mr. Chattaway. She said it must not be set at liberty again, or we might have the law down upon Trevlyn Hold."

"Yes; that's all Miss Trevlyn and he care for—the law," returned George, in a tone of pain. "What do they care for the death of my father?"

"George, he is better off," said she, in a dreamy manner, her face turned towards the stars. "I am very sorry; I have cried a great deal to-day over it; and I wish it had never happened; I wish he was back with us, but still he is better off; Aunt Edith says so. You don't know how she has cried."

"Yes," answered George, his heart very full.

"Mamma and papa are better off," continued Maude. "Your own mamma is better off. The next world is a happier one than this."

George made no rejoinder. Favourite though Maude was with George Ryle, those were heavy moments for him. They proceeded in silence until they turned in at the great gate by the lodge. The lodge was a round building, containing two rooms upstairs and two down. Its walls were not very substantial, and the sound of voices could be heard from inside the window. Maude stopped in consternation.

"George! that is Rupert talking!"

"Rupert! You told me he was in bed."

"He was sent to bed. He must have got out of the window again. I am sure it is his voice. Oh, what will be done if it is found out?"

George Ryle swung himself on to the very narrow ledge which ran underneath the window, contriving to hold on by his hands and toes. The inside shutter ascended only three parts up the window, and George thus obtained a view of the room.

"Yes, it is Rupert," said he, as he jumped down. "He is sitting there, talking to old Canham."

But the same slightness of structure which allowed inside noises to be heard without the lodge, allowed outside noises to be heard within. Ann Canham had come hastening to the door, opened it a few inches, and stood peeping out. Maude took the opportunity to slip past her into the room.

But no trace of her brother was there. Mark Canham was sitting in his usual invalid seat by the fire, smoking a pipe, his back towards the door.

"Where is he gone?" cried Maude.

"Where's who gone?" roughly spoke old Canham, without turning his head. "There ain't nobody here."

"Father, it's Miss Maude," interposed Ann Canham, closing the outer door, after allowing George to enter. "Who be you taking her for?"

The old man, partly disabled by rheumatism, put down his pipe, and contrived to turn in his chair. "Eh, Miss Maude! Why, who'd ever have thought of seeing you to-night?"

"Where is Rupert gone?" asked Maude.

"Rupert?" composedly returned old Canham. "Is it Master Rupert you're asking after? How should we know where he is, Miss Maude?"

"We saw him here," interposed George Ryle. "He was sitting on that bench, talking to you. We both heard his voice, and I saw him."

"Very odd!" said the old man. "Fancy goes a great way. Folks is ofttimes deluded by it."

"Mark Canham, I tell you, we——"

"Wait a minute, George," interrupted Maude. She opened the door which led into the outer room, and stood with it in her hand, looking into the darkness. "Rupert!" she called out, "it is only I and George Ryle. You need not hide yourself."

It brought forth Rupert; that lovely boy, with his large blue eyes and his auburn curls. There was a great likeness between him and Maude; but Maude's hair was lighter.

"I thought it was Cris," he said. "He is learning to be as sly as a fox: though I don't know that he was ever anything else. When I am ordered to bed before my time, he has taken to dodge into the room every ten minutes to see that I am safe in it. Have they missed me, Maude?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I came away, too, without their knowing it. I have been down to Aunt Ryle's, and George has brought me back again."

"Will you be pleased to sit down, Miss Maude?" asked Ann Canham, dusting a chair.

"Eh, but that's a pretty picture!" cried old Canham, gazing at Maude, who had slipped off her heavy shawl, and stood warming her hands at the fire.

Mark Canham was right. A very pretty picture. He extended the hand that was not helpless, and laid it on her wrist.

"Miss Maude, I mind me seeing your mother looking just as you look now. The Squire was out, and the young ladies at the Hold thought they'd give a dance, and Parson Dean and Miss Emily were invited to it. I don't know that they'd have been asked if the Squire had been at home, matters not being smooth between him and the parson. She was older than you be; but she was dressed just as you be now; and I could fancy, as I look at you, that it was her over again. I was in the rooms, helping to wait, handing round the negus and things. It doesn't seem so long ago! Miss Emily was the sweetest-looking of 'em all present; and the young heir seemed to think so. He opened the ball with Miss Emily in spite of his sisters; they wanted him to choose somebody grander. Ah, me! and both of 'em lying low so soon after, leaving you two behind 'em!"

"Mark!" cried Rupert, casting his eyes on the old man—eyes sparkling with excitement—"if they had lived, my papa and mamma, I should not have been sent to bed to-night because there's another party at Trevlyn Hold."

Mark's only answer was to put up his hands with an indignant gesture. Ann Canham was still offering the chair to Maude. Maude declined it.

"I cannot stop, Ann. They will miss me if I don't return. Rupert, you will come?"

"To be boxed up in my bedroom, whilst the rest of you are enjoying yourselves," cried Rupert. "They would like to take the spirit out of me; they have been trying at it a long time."

Maude wound her arm within his. "Do come, Rupert!" she whispered coaxingly. "Think of the disturbance if Cris should find you here and tell!"

"And tell!" repeated Rupert, in mocking tones. "*Not* to tell would be impossible to Cris Chattaway. It's what he'd delight in more than in gold. I'd not be the sneak Cris Chattaway is for the world."

But Rupert appeared to think it well to depart with his sister. As they were going out, old Canham spoke to George.

"And Miss Trevlyn, sir—how does she bear it? Forgive me, I'm always a-forgetting myself and going back to the old days. 'Twas but a week a-gone I called Madam 'Miss Edith' to her face. I should ha' said 'Mrs. Ryle,' sir."

"She bears it very well, Mark," answered George.

Something, George himself could not have told what, caused

him not to bear it well just then. The tears rushed to his eyes unbidden. The old man marked them.

"There's one comfort for ye, Master George," he said, in low tones: "that he has took all his neighbours' sorrow with him. And as much couldn't be said if every gentleman round about here was cut off by death."

The significant tone was not needed to tell George that the words "every gentleman" was meant for Mr. Chattaway. The master of Trevlyn Hold was, in fact, no greater favourite with old Canham than he was with George Ryle.

"Mind how you get in, Master Rupert, so that they don't fall upon you," whispered Ann Canham, as she held open the lodge door.

"I'll mind, Ann Canham," was the boy's answer. "Not that I should care much if they did," he added. "I am getting tired of it."

She stood and watched them up the dark walk until a turn in the road hid them from view, and then closed the door. "If they don't take to treat him kinder, I misdoubt me but he'll be doing something desperate, as the dead-and-gone heir, Rupert, did," she remarked, sitting down by her father.

"Like enough," was the old man's reply, taking up his pipe again. "He have the true Trevlyn temper, have young Rupert."

"I say, Maude," began Rupert, as they wound their way up the dark avenue, "don't they know you came out?"

"They would not have let me come if they had known it," replied Maude. "I have been wanting to go down all day, but Aunt Diana and Octave kept me in. I cried to go down last night when Bill Webb brought the news, and they were angry with me."

"Do you know what I should have done in Chattaway's place, George?" cried the boy, impulsively. "I should have loaded my gun the minute I heard of it, and shot the beast between the eyes. Chattaway would, if he were half a man."

"It is of no use talking of it, Rupert," answered George, in a sadly subdued tone. "It would not mend the evil."

"Only fancy their having this rout to-night, while Mr. Ryle is lying dead!" indignantly resumed Rupert. "Aunt Edith ought to have interfered for once, and stopped it."

"Aunt Edith did interfere," spoke up Maude. "She said it must be put off. But Octave would not hear of it, and Miss Diana said Mr Ryle was no blood rela——"

Maude dropped her voice. They were now in view of the house and its lighted windows; and some one, probably hearing their footsteps, came bearing down upon them with a fleet step. It was Cris Chattaway. Rupert stole into the trees, and disappeared: Maude, holding George's arm, bore bravely on, and met him.

"Where have you been, Maude? The house has been searched for you. What brings *you* here?" he roughly added to George.

"I came because I chose to come," was George's answer.

"None of that insolence," returned Cris. "We don't want you here to-night. Just be off from this."

Was Cris Chattaway's motive a good one, under his rudeness? Did he feel ashamed of the gaiety going on, while Mr. Ryle, his uncle by marriage, was lying dead, under circumstances so unhappy? Was he anxious to conceal the unseemly proceeding from George? Perhaps so.

"I shall go back when I have taken Maude to the hall-door," said George. "Not before."

Anything that might have been said further by Cris, was interrupted by the appearance of Miss Trevlyn. She was standing on the steps.

"Where have you been, Maude?"

"To Trevlyn Farm, Aunt Diana," was Maude's truthful answer. "You would not let me go in the day, so I have been now. It seemed to me that I must see him before he was put underground."

"See *him!*" cried Miss Trevlyn.

"Yes. It was all I went for. I did not see my aunt. Thank you, George, for bringing me home," she continued, stepping in. "Good night. I would have given all I have for it never to have happened."

She burst into a passionate flood of tears as she spoke—the result, no doubt, of her previous fright and excitement, as well as of her sorrow for Mr. Ryle's unhappy fate. George wrung her hand, and lifted his hat to Miss Trevlyn as he turned away.

But ere he had well plunged into the dark avenue, there came swift and stealthy steps behind him. A soft hand was laid upon him, and a soft voice spoke, broken by its tears:

"Oh, George, I am so sorry! I have felt all day as if it would almost be my death. I think I could have given my own life to save his."

"I know, I know," he answered. "I know how *you* will feel it." And George, utterly unmanned, burst into tears also.

It was Mrs. Chattaway.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROMANCE OF TREVLYN HOLD.

It is impossible to go on without a word of retrospect. The Ryles, gentlemen by descent, had once been rich men, but they were openhanded and heedless, and in the time of George's grandfather, the farm (not called the farm then) passed into the possession of the Trevlyns of the Hold, who had a mortgage on it. They named it Trevlyn Farm, and Mr. Ryle and his son remained on it as tenants; as tenants where they had once been owners.

After old Mr. Ryle's death, his son married the daughter of the curate of Barbrook, the Reverend George Berkeley, familiarly known as Parson Berkeley. In point of fact, the parish knew no other pastor, for its Rector was an absentee. Mary Berkeley was an only child. She had been petted, and physicked, and nursed, after the manner of only children, and grew up sickly as a matter of course. A delicate, beautiful girl in appearance, but not strong. People (who are always fond, you know, of settling everybody else's business for them) deemed that she made a poor match in marrying Thomas Ryle. It was whispered, however, that he himself might have made a greater match, had he chosen—no other than Squire Trevlyn's eldest daughter. There was not so handsome, so attractive a man in all the country round as Thomas Ryle.

Soon after the marriage, Parson Berkeley died—to the intense grief of his daughter, Mrs. Ryle. He was succeeded in the curacy and parsonage by a young clergyman just in priest's orders, the Reverend Shafto Dean. A well-meaning man, but opinionated and self-sufficient in the highest degree, and before he had been one month at the parsonage, he and Squire Trevlyn were at issue. Mr. Dean wished to introduce certain new fashions and customs into the church and parish; Squire Trevlyn held to the old. Proud, haughty, overbearing, but honourable and generous, Squire Trevlyn had known no master, no

opposer; *he* was lord of the neighbourhood, and was bowed down to accordingly. Mr. Dean would not give way, the Squire would not give way; and the little seed of dissension grew and spread. Obstinacy begets obstinacy. That which a slight yielding on either side, a little mutual good-feeling, might have removed at first, became at length a terrible breach, the talk of a county.

Meanwhile Thomas Ryle's fair young wife died, leaving an infant boy—George. In spite of her husband's loving care, in spite of having been shielded from all work and management, so necessary on a farm, she died. Nora Dickson, a humble relative of the Ryle family, who had been partially brought up on the farm, was housekeeper and manager. She saved all trouble to young Mrs. Ryle: but she could not save her life.

The past history of Trevlyn Hold was a romance in itself. Squire Trevlyn had five children: Rupert, Maude, Joseph, Edith, and Diana. Rupert, Maude, and Diana were imperious as their father; Joseph and Edith were mild, yielding, and gentle, as had been their mother. Rupert was of course regarded as the heir, intended to be so: but the property was not entailed. An ancestor of Squire Trevlyn's coming from some distant part—it was said Cornwall—bought it and settled down upon it. There was not a great deal of grass land on the estate, but the coal-mines in the distance made it valuable. Of all his children, Rupert, the eldest, was the Squire's favourite: but poor Rupert did not live to come into the estate. He had inherited the fits of passion characteristic of the Trevlyn's; he was of a thoughtless, impetuous nature; and he fell into trouble and ran away from his country. He embarked for a distant port, which he did not live to reach. And Joseph became the heir.

Very different, he, from his brother Rupert. Gentle and yielding, like his sister Edith, the Squire half despised him. The Squire would have preferred him passionate, haughty, and overbearing—a true Trevlyn. But the Squire had no intention of superseding him in the succession of Trevlyn Hold. Provided Joseph lived, none other would be its inheritor. *Provided.* Joseph—always called Joe—appeared to have inherited his mother's constitution; and she had died early, of decline.

Yielding, however, as Joe Trevlyn was naturally, on one point he did not prove himself so—that of his marriage. He chose Emily Dean; the pretty and lovable sister of Squire Trevlyn's *bête noire*, the obstinate parson. "I would rather

you took a wife out of the parish workhouse, Joe," the Squire said, in his anger. Joe said little in reply, but he held to his choice; and one fine morning the marriage was celebrated by the obstinate parson himself in the church at Barbrook.

The Squire and Thomas Ryle were close friends, and the former was fond of passing his evenings at the farm. The farm was not a productive one. The land, never of the richest, had become poorer and poorer: it wanted draining and manuring; it wanted, in short, money laid out upon it; and that money Mr. Ryle did not possess. "I shall have to leave it, and try and take a farm in better condition," he said at length to the Squire.

The Squire, with all his faults and his overbearing temper, was generous and considerate. He knew what the land wanted; money spent on it; he knew Mr. Ryle had not the money to spend, and he offered to lend it him. Mr. Ryle accepted it, to the amount of two thousand pounds. He gave a bond for the sum, and the Squire on his part promised to renew the lease upon the present terms, when the time of renewal came, and not to raise the rent. This promise was not given in writing: but none ever doubted the word of Squire Trevlyn.

The first of Squire Trevlyn's children to marry, had been Edith: she had married, some years before, Mr. Chattaway. The two next to marry had been Maude and Joseph. Joseph, as you have heard, married Emily Dean; Maude, the eldest daughter, became the second wife of Mr. Ryle. A twelvemonth after the death of his fair young wife Mary, Miss Trevlyn of the Hold stepped into her shoes, and became the step-mother of the little baby boy, George. The youngest daughter, Diana, never married.

Miss Trevlyn, in marrying Thomas Ryle, gave mortal offence to some of her kindred. The Squire himself would have forgiven it; nay, perhaps have grown to like it—for he never could do otherwise than like Thomas Ryle—but he was constantly incited against it by his family. Mr. Chattaway, who had no great means of living of his own, was at the Hold on a long, long visit, with his wife and two little children, Christopher and Octavia. They were always saying they must leave; but they did *not* leave; they stayed on. Mr. Chattaway made himself useful to the Squire on business matters, and whether they ever would leave was a question. She, Mrs. Chattaway, was too

gentle-spirited and loving to speak against her sister and Mr. Ryle; but Chattaway and Miss Diana Trevlyn kept up the ball. In point of fact, they had a motive—at least, Chattaway had—for making permanent the estrangement between the Squire and Mr. Ryle, for it was thought that Squire Trevlyn would have to look out for another heir.

News had come home of poor Joe Trevlyn's failing health. He had taken up his abode in the south of France on his marriage: for even then the doctors had begun to say that a more genial climate than this could alone save the life of the heir to Trevlyn. Bitterly as the Squire had felt the marriage, angry as he had been with Joe, he had never had the remotest thought of disinheriting him. He was the only son left: and Squire Trevlyn would never, if he could help it, bequeath Trevlyn Hold to a woman. A little girl, Maude, was born in due time to Joe Trevlyn and his wife; and not long after this, there arrived the tidings that Joe's health was rapidly failing. Mr. Chattaway, selfish, mean, sly, covetous, began to entertain hopes that *he* should be named the heir; he began to work on for it in stealthy determination. He did not forget that, were it bequeathed to the husband of one of the daughters, Mr. Ryle, as the husband of the eldest, might be considered to possess most claim to it. No wonder then that he did all he could, secretly and openly, to incite the Squire against Mr. Ryle and his wife. And in this he was joined by Miss Diana Trevlyn. She, haughty and imperious, resented the marriage of her sister with one of inferior position, and willingly espoused the cause of Mr. Chattaway as against Thomas Ryle. It was whispered about, none knew with what truth, that Miss Diana made a compact with Chattaway, to the effect that she should reign jointly at Trevlyn Hold with him and enjoy part of its revenues, if he came into the inheritance.

Before the news came of Joe Trevlyn's death—and it was some months in coming—Squire Trevlyn had taken to his bed. Never did man seem to fade so rapidly as the Squire. Not only his health, but his mind failed him; all its vigour seemed gone. He mourned poor Joe excessively. In rude health and strength, he would not have mourned him; at least, would not have shown that he did so; never a man less inclined than the Squire to allow his private emotions to be seen: but in his weakened state, he gave way to lamentation for his heir (his *heir*, note you, more than his son) every hour in the day. Over and over again he regretted that the little child, Maude,

left by Joe, was not a boy. Nay, had it not been for his prejudice against her mother, he would have willed the estate to her, girl though she was. Now was Mr. Chattaway's time: he put forth in glowing colours his own claims, as Edith's husband; he made golden promises; he persuaded the poor Squire, in his wrecked mind, that black was white—and his plans succeeded.

To the will which had bequeathed the estate to the eldest son, dead Rupert, the Squire added a codicil, to the effect that, failing his two sons, James Chattaway was the inheritor. But all this was kept a profound secret.

During the time the Squire lay ill, Mr. Ryle went to Trevlyn Hold, and succeeded in obtaining an interview. Mr. Chattaway was out that day, or he had never accomplished it. Miss Diana Trevlyn was out. All the Squire's animosity departed the moment he saw Thomas Ryle's long-familiar face. He lay clasping his hand, and lamenting their estrangement; he told him he should cancel the two-thousand-pound bond, giving the money as his daughter's fortune; he said his promise of renewing the lease of the farm to him on the same terms would be held sacred, for he had left a memorandum to that effect amongst his papers. He sent for a certain box, in which the bond for the two thousand pounds had been placed, and searched for it, intending to give it to him then; but the bond was not there, and he said that Mr. Chattaway, who managed all his affairs now, must have placed it elsewhere. But he would ask him for it when he came in, and it should be destroyed before he slept. Altogether, it was a most pleasant and satisfactory interview.

But strange news arrived from abroad ere the Squire died. Not strange, certainly, in itself; only strange because it was so very unexpected. Joseph Trevlyn's widow had given birth to a boy! On the very day that little Maude was twelve months old, exactly three months after Joe's death, this little fellow was born. Mr. Chattaway opened the letter, and I'll leave you to judge of his state of mind. A male heir, after he had made everything so safe and sure!

But Mr. Chattaway was not a man to be balked. *He* would not be deprived of the inheritance, if he could by any possible scheming retain it, no matter what wrong he dealt out to others. James Chattaway had as little conscience as most people. The whole of that day he never spoke of the news; he kept it to himself; and the next morning there arrived a

second letter, which rendered the affair a little more complicated. Young Mrs. Trevlyn was dead. She had died, leaving the two little ones, Maude and the infant.

Squire Trevlyn was always saying, "Oh, that Joe had left a boy; that Joe had left a boy!" And now, as it was found, Joe *had* left one. But Mr. Chattaway determined that the fact should never reach the Squire's ears to gladden them. Something had to be done, however, or the little children would be coming to Trevlyn. Mr. Chattaway arranged his plans, and wrote off hastily to stop their departure. He told the Squire that Joe's widow had died, leaving Maude; but he never said a word about the baby boy. Had the Squire lived, perhaps it could not have been kept from him; but he did not live; he went to his grave all too soon, never knowing that there was a male heir born to Trevlyn.

The danger was over then. Mr. Chattaway was legal inheritor. Had Joe left ten boys, they could not have displaced him. Trevlyn Hold was his by the Squire's will, and could not be wrested from him. The two little ones, friendless and penniless, were brought home to the Hold. Mrs. Trevlyn had lived long enough to name the infant "Rupert," after the old Squire and the heir who had run away and died. Poor Joe had always said that if ever he had a boy, it should be named after his brother.

There they had been ever since, these two orphans, aliens in the home that ought to have been theirs; lovely children, both of them; but Rupert had the passionate Trevlyn temper. It was not made a systematically unkind home for them; Miss Diana would not have allowed that; but it was a very different home from that they ought to have enjoyed. Mr. Chattaway was at times almost cruel to Rupert; Christopher exercised upon him all sorts of galling and petty tyranny, as Octave Chattaway did upon Maude; and the neighbourhood, you may be quite sure, did not fail to talk. But it was not known abroad, you understand, except to one or two, that Mr. Chattaway had kept the fact of Rupert's birth from the Squire.

He stood tolerably well with his fellow-men, did Chattaway. In himself he was not liked; nay, he was very much disliked; but he was owner of Trevlyn Hold, and possessed sway in the neighbourhood. One thing, he could not get the title of Squire accorded to him. In vain he strove for it; he exacted it from his tenants; he wrote notes in the third person, "Squire Chattaway presents his compliments," etc.; or, "the Squire of

Trevlyn Hold desires," etc., etc., all in vain. People readily accorded his wife the title of Madam—as it was the custom to call the mistress of Trevlyn Hold—she was the old Squire's daughter, and they recognized her claim to it, but they did not give that of Squire to her husband.

These things had happened years ago, for Maude and Rupert are now aged respectively thirteen and twelve, and all that time had James Chattaway enjoyed his sway. Never, never; no, not even in the still night when the voice of conscience in most men is so suggestive; never giving a thought to the wrong dealt out to Rupert.

And it must be mentioned that the first thing Mr. Chattaway did, after the death of Squire Trevlyn, was to sue Mr. Ryle upon the bond; which he had *not* destroyed, although ordered to do so by the Squire. The next thing he did was to raise the farm to a ruinous rent. Mr. Ryle, naturally indignant, remonstrated, and there had been ill-feeling between them from that hour to this; but Chattaway had the law on his own side. Some of the bond was paid off; but altogether, what with the increased rent, the bond and its interest, and a succession of ill-luck on the farm, Mr. Ryle had scarcely been able to keep his head above water. As he said to his wife and children, when the bull had done its work—he was taken from a world of care.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. RYLE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

ETIQUETTE, touching the important ceremonies of buryings and christenings, is much more observed in the country than in towns. To rural districts this remark especially applies. In a large town people don't know their next-door neighbours, don't care for their neighbours' opinions. In a smaller place the inhabitants are almost as one family, and their actions are chiefly governed by that pertinent remark, "What will people say?" In these narrow communities, numbers of which are scattered about England, it is considered necessary on the occasion of a funeral to invite all kith and kin. Omit to do so, and it would be set down as a premeditated slight; affording the parish a theme of gossip for weeks afterwards. Hence

Mr. Chattaway, being a connection—brother-in-law, in fact, of the deceased gentleman's wife—was invited to follow the remains of Thomas Ryle to the grave. In spite of the bad terms they had been on; in spite of Mrs. Ryle's own bitter feelings against Chattaway and Trevlyn Hold generally; in spite of Mr. Ryle's death having been caused by Chattaway's bull—Mr. Chattaway received a formal invitation to attend as mourner the remains to the grave. And it never would have entered into Mr. Chattaway's idea of good manners to decline it.

An inquest had been held at the nearest inn. The verdict returned was "Accidental Death," with a deodand of five pounds upon the bull. Which Mr. Chattaway had to pay.

The bull was already condemned. Not to annihilation; but to be taken to a distant fair, and there sold; whence he would be conveyed to other pastures, where he might possibly gore somebody else. It was not consideration for the feelings of the Ryle family which induced Mr. Chattaway to adopt this step, and so rid the neighbourhood of the animal; but consideration for his own pocket. Feeling ran high in the vicinity; fear also; the stoutest hearts could feel no security that the bull might not have a tilt at them: and Chattaway, on his part, was as little certain that an effectual silencer would not be dealt out to the bull some quiet night. Therefore, he resolved to part with him. Apart from his misdoings, he was a valuable animal, worth a great deal more than Mr. Chattaway would like to lose; and the bull was dismissed.

The day of the funeral arrived, and those bidden to it began to assemble about one o'clock: that is, the undertaker's men, the clerk, and the carriers. Of the latter, Jim Sanders made one. "Better that he had gone than his master," said Nora, in a matter-of-fact, worldly spirit of reasoning, as her thoughts were cast back to the mysterious hole with which she had gratuitously, and the reader will no doubt say absurdly, coupled Jim's fate. A table of eatables was laid out in the entrance-room: cold round of beef, and bread-and-cheese, with large supplies of ale. To help to convey a coffin to church without being first regaled with a good meal, was a thing that Barbrook had never heard of, and never wished to hear of. The select members of the company were shown to the large drawing-room, where the refreshment consisted of port and sherry, and a plate of "pound" cake. These were the established rules of hospitality at all genteel, well-to-do funerals: wine and

pound cake for the gentlefolks; cold beef and ale for the men. They had been observed at Squire Trevlyn's; at Mr. Ryle's father's; at every substantial funeral within the memory of Barbrook. Mr. Chattaway, Mr. Berkeley (a distant relative of Mr. Ryle's first wife), Mr. King the surgeon, and Farmer Apperley comprised the assemblage in the drawing room.

At two o'clock, after some little difficulty in getting it into order, the sad procession started. It had then been joined by George and Trevlyn Ryle. A great many spectators had collected to view and attend it. The infrequency of a funeral in the respectable class, combined with the circumstances attending the death, drew them together: and before the church was reached, where it was met by the clergyman, it had a train half-a-mile long after it; chiefly women and children. Many dropped a tear for the premature death of one who had lived amongst them as a good master, a kind neighbour.

They left him in his grave, by the side of his long-ago-dead wife, Mary Berkeley. As George stood at the head of his father's coffin, during the ceremony in the churchyard, the gravestone with its name was right in front of him; his mother's name: "Mary, the wife of Thomas Ryle, and only daughter of the Rev. George Berkeley." None knew with what a feeling of loneliness the orphan boy turned from the spot, as the last words of the minister died away.

Mrs. Ryle, in her widow's weeds, was seated in the drawing-room on their return, as the gentlemen filed into it. In Barbrook custom, the relatives of the deceased, near or distant, were expected to assemble together for the remainder of the day; or for a portion of it. The gentlemen would sometimes smoke, and the ladies in their deep mourning sat with their hands folded in their laps, resting on their snow-white handkerchiefs. The conversation was only allowed to run on family matters, future prospects, and the like; and the voices were amicable and subdued.

As the mourners entered, they shook hands severally with Mrs. Ryle. Chattaway put out his hand last, and with perceptible hesitation. It was many a year since his hand had been given in fellowship to Mrs. Ryle, or had taken hers. They had been friendly once, and in the old days he had called her "Maude:" but that was over now.

Mrs. Ryle turned from the offered hand. "No," she said, speaking in quiet but most decisive tones. "I cannot forget

the past sufficiently for that, James Chattaway. On this day it is forcibly present to me."

They sat down. Trevlyn next his mother, called there by her. The gentlemen disposed themselves on the side of the table facing the fire, and George found a chair a little behind them; no one seemed to notice him. And so much the better; the boy's heart was too full to bear much notice then.

On the table was placed the paper which had been written by the surgeon, at the dictation of Mr. Ryle, the night when he lay in extremity. It had not been unfolded since. Mr. King took it up; he knew that he was expected to read it. They were waiting for him to do so.

"I must premise that the writing of this is Mr. Ryle's," he said. "He expressly requested me to pen down his *own words*, just as they came from his lips. He——"

"Is it a will?" interrupted Farmer Apperley, a little gentleman, with a red face and a large nose. He had come to the funeral in top boots, which constituted his idea of full dress.

"You can call it a will, if you please," replied Mr. King. "I am not sure that the law would do so. It was in consequence of his not having made a will that he requested me to write down these few directions."

The farmer nodded; and Mr. King began to read.

"In the name of God: Amen. I, Thomas Ryle.

"First of all, I bequeath my soul to God. Trusting that He will pardon my sins, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

"It's a dreadful blow, the killing of me by that bull of Chattaway's. The more so, that I am unable to leave things straightforward for my wife and children. They know—at least, my wife knows, and all the parish knows—the pressure that has been upon me, through Chattaway coming down upon me as he has done. I have been as a bird with its wings clipped. As soon as I tried to get up, I was pulled down again.

"Ill luck has been upon me besides. Beasts have died off, and crops have failed. The farm's not good for much, for all the money that has been laid out upon it, and no one but me knows the labour it has cost. When you think of these things, my dear wife and boys, you'll know why I do not leave you better provided for. Many and many a night have I laid awake upon my bed, fretting, and planning, and hoping, all for your sakes. Perhaps if that bull had spared me to old age, I might have left you better off.

"I should like to bequeath the furniture and all that is in the house, and the stock, and the beasts, and all that I die possessed of, to my dear wife, Maude—but it's not of any use, for Chattaway will sell up—except the silver tankard, and that should go to Trevlyn. But for having 'T. R.' upon it, it should go to George, for he is the eldest. T. R. stood for my father, and T. R. has stood for me, and T. R. will stand for Trevlyn. George, though he is the eldest, won't grudge it him, if I know anything of his nature. And I give to George my watch, and I hope he'll keep it for his dead father's sake. It is only a silver one, as I dare say you have noticed, doctor; but it's a very good one, and George can have his initials engraved on the shield at the back. And the three seals, and the gold key, I give to him with it. The red cornelian has our arms on it. For we had arms once, and my father and I have generally sealed our letters with them: not that they have done him or me any good. And let Treve keep the tankard faithfully, and never part with it. And remember, my dear boys, that your poor father would have left you better keepsakes had it been in his power. You must prize these for the dead giver's sake. But there! it's of no use talking, for Chattaway, he'll sell up, watch and tankard, and all.

"And I should like to leave that bay foal to my dear little Caroline. It will be a rare pretty creature when it's bigger. And you must let it have the run of the three-cornered paddock, and I should like to see her on it, sweet little soul!—but Chattaway's bull has stopped it. And don't grudge the cost of a little saddle for her; and Roger can break it in; and mind you are all true and tender with my dear little girl. If I thought you wouldn't be, I would rather have her with me in my coffin. But you are good lads—though Treve is hasty when his temper's put out—and I know you'll be to her what brothers ought to be. I always meant that foal for Carry, since I saw how pretty it was likely to grow, though I didn't say what was in my mind; and now I give it to her. But where's the use? Chattaway will sell up.

"If he does sell up, to the last stick and stone, he won't get his debt in full. Perhaps not much above the half of it; for things at a forced sale don't bring their value. You have put down 'his debt,' Mr. King, I suppose; but it is not his debt. I am on my death-bed, and I say that the two thousand pounds was made a present of to me by the Squire on *his* death-bed. He told me it was made all right with Chattaway; that Chatta-

way understood the promise given to me, not to raise the rent; and that he'd be the same just landlord to me that the Squire had been. The Squire could not lay his hand on the bond, or he would have given it me then; but he said Chattaway should burn it as soon as he entered, which would be in an hour or two. Chattaway knows whether he has acted up to this; and now his bull has done for me.

"And I wish to tell Chattaway that if he'll act a fair part as a man ought, and let my wife and the boys stop on the farm, he'll stand a much better chance of getting the money, than he would if he turns them out of it. I don't say this for their sakes more than for his; but because from my heart I believe it to be the truth. George has his head on his shoulders the right way, and I would advise his mother to keep him on the farm; he will be getting older every day. Not but that I wish her to use her own judgment in all things, for her judgment is good. In time, they may be able to pay off Chattaway; in time they may be able even to buy back the farm, for I cannot forget that it belonged to my forefathers, and not to the Squire. That is, if Chattaway will be reasonable, and let them stop on it, and not be hard and pressing. But perhaps I am talking nonsense, doctor, for he may turn them off and do for them, as his bull has done for me.

"And now, my dear George and Treve, I repeat it to you, be good boys to your mother. Obey her in all things. Maude, I have left all to you in preference to dividing it between you and them, for which there is no time; but I know you'll do the right thing by them: and when it comes to your turn to leave—if Chattaway don't sell up—I wish you to bequeath to them in equal shares what you die possessed of. George is not your son, but he is mine, and—— But perhaps I'd better not say what I was going to say, doctor. And, my boys, work while it's day. In that Book which I have not read so much as I ought to have read, it says 'The night cometh when no man can work.' When we hear that read in church, or when we get the Book out on a Sunday evening and read it to ourselves, that night seems a long, long way off. It seems so far off that it can hardly ever be any concern of ours; and it is only when we are cut off suddenly that we find how very near it is. That night has come for me; and that night will come for you before you are aware of it. So, *work*—and score that, doctor. God has placed us in this world to work, and not to be ashamed of it; and to work for Him as well as for ourselves. It was often

in my mind that I ought to work more for God—that I ought to think more of Him; and I used to say, 'I will do so when a bit of this bother's off my mind.' But the bother was always there, and I never did it. And now the end's come; and I can see things would have been made easier to me if I *had* done it—score it again, doctor—and I say it as a lesson to you, my children.

"And I think that's about all; and I am much obliged to you, doctor, for writing this. I hope they'll be able to manage things on the farm, and I would ask my neighbour Apperley to give them his advice now and then, for old friendship's sake, until George shall be older, and to put him in a way of buying and selling stock. If Chattaway don't sell up, that is. If he does, I hardly know how it will be. Perhaps God will put them in some other way, and take care of them. And I would leave my best thanks to Nora, for she has been a true friend to us all, and I don't know how the house would have got on without her. And now I am growing faint, doctor, and I think the end is coming. God bless you all, my dear ones. Amen."

A deep silence fell on the room as Mr. King ceased. He folded the paper, and laid it on the table near Mrs. Ryle. The first to speak was Farmer Apperley.

"Any help that I can be of to you and George, Mrs. Ryle, and to all of you, is heartily at your service. It will be yours with right goodwill at all times and seasons. The more so, that you know if I had been cut off in this way, my poor friend Ryle would have been the first to offer to do as much for my wife and boys, and have thought no trouble of it. George, you can come over and ask me about things, just as you would ask your father; or send for me up here to the farm; and whatever work I may be at at home, though it was the putting out of a barn on fire, I'd come."

"And now it is my turn to speak," said Mr. Chattaway. "And, Mrs. Ryle, I give you my promise, in the presence of these gentlemen, that if you choose to remain on the farm, I will put no hindrance upon it. Your husband thought me hard—unjust; he said it before my face and behind my back. My opinion always has been that he entirely mistook Squire Trevlyn in that last interview he had with him. I do not think it was ever the Squire's intention to cancel the bond: Ryle must have misunderstood him altogether: at any rate, I heard nothing of it. As successor to the estate, the bond came into my possession; and in my wife and children's interest I could

not consent to destroy it. No one but a soft-hearted man—and that's what Ryle was, poor fellow—would have thought of asking such a thing. But I was willing to give him every facility for paying it, and I did do so. No! It was not my hardness that was in fault, but his pride and nonsense, and his thinking I ought not to ask for my own money——"

"If you bring up these things, James Chattaway, I must answer them," interrupted Mrs. Ryle. "I would prefer not to be forced to do it to-day."

"I do not want to bring them up in any unpleasant spirit," answered Mr. Chattaway; "or to say it was his fault or my fault. We'll let bygones be bygones. He is gone, poor man; and I wish that savage beast of a bull had been in four quarters, before he had done the mischief! All I would now say, is, that I'll put no impediment to your remaining on the farm. We will not go into business details this afternoon, but I will come in any day that you like to appoint, and talk it over. If you choose to keep on the farm at its present rent—it is well worth it—to pay me interest for the money owing, and a yearly sum towards diminishing the debt, you are welcome to do it."

Just what Nora had predicted! Mr. Chattaway loved money too greatly to run the risk of losing part of the debt—as he probably would do if he turned them from the farm. Mrs. Ryle bowed her head in cold acquiescence. She saw no way open to her except that of accepting the offer. Very probably Mr. Chattaway knew that there was no other.

"The sooner things are settled, the better," she remarked. "I will name eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good; I'll be here," he answered. "And I am glad it is decided amicably."

The rest of those present appeared also to be glad. Perhaps they had feared some unpleasant recrimination might take place between Mrs. Ryle and James Chattaway. Thus relieved, they unbent a little, and crossed their legs as if inclined to become more sociable.

"What shall you do with the boys, Mrs. Ryle?" suddenly asked Farmer Apperley.

"Treve, of course, will go to school as usual," she replied. "George—— I have not decided about George."

"Shall I have to leave school?" cried George, looking up with a start.

"Of course you will," said Mrs. Ryle.

"But what will become of my Latin; of my studies alto-

gether?" returned George, in tones of dismay. "You know, mamma——"

"It cannot be helped, George," she interrupted, speaking in the uncompromising and decisive manner, so characteristic of her; as it was of her sister, Miss Diana Trevlyn. "You must turn your attention to something more profitable than schooling, now."

"If a boy of fifteen has not had schooling enough, I'd like to know when he has had it?" interposed Farmer Apperley, who neither understood nor approved of the strides which education and intellect had made since the time when he was a boy. Very substantial people in his day had been content to learn to read and write and cipher, and to deem that amount of learning sufficient to grow rich upon. As did the Dutch professor, to whom George Primrose wished to teach Greek, but who declined the offer. He had never learned Greek; he had lived, and ate, and slept without Greek; and therefore he did not see any good in Greek. Thus was it with Farmer Apperley.

"What do you learn at school, George?" questioned Mr. Berkeley.

"Latin and Greek, and mathematics, and——"

"But, George, where will be the good of such things to you?" cried Farmer Apperley, not allowing him to end the catalogue. "Latin and Greek and mathematics! that *is* fine, that is!"

"I don't see much good in giving a boy that sort of education myself," put in Mr. Chattaway, before any one else had time to speak. "Unless he is to be reared to a profession, the classics only lie fallow in the memory. I hated them, I know that; I and my brother, too. Many and many a caning we have had over our Latin, until we wished the books at the bottom of the sea. Twelve months after we left school we could not have construed a page, had it been put before us. That's all the good learning Latin did for us."

"I shall keep up my Latin and Greek," observed George, very independently, "although I may have to leave school."

"Why need you keep it up?" asked Mr. Chattaway, turning to look full at George.

"Why?" echoed George. "I like it, for one thing. And a knowledge of the classics is necessary to a gentleman, nowadays."

"Necessary to what?" cried Mr. Chattaway.

"To a gentleman," repeated George.

"Oh," said Mr. Chattaway. "Do you think of being one?"

"Yes, I do," repeated George, in a tone as decisive as any ever used by his step-mother.

This bold assertion nearly took away the breath of Farmer Apperley. Had George Ryle announced his intention of becoming a Botany Bay convict, Mr. Apperley's consternation had been scarcely less. The same word bears different constructions to different minds. That of "gentleman" in the mouth of George, could only bear one to the plain and simple farmer.

"Hey, lad! What wild notions have ye been getting in your head?" he asked.

"George," spoke Mrs. Ryle almost at the same moment, "are you going to give me trouble at the very outset? There is nothing for you to look forward to but work. Your father said it."

"Of course I look forward to work, mamma," returned George, as cheerfully as he could speak that sad afternoon. "But that will not prevent my being a gentleman."

"George, I fancy you may be somewhat misusing terms," remarked the surgeon, who was an old inhabitant of that rustic district, and a little more advanced than the rest. "What you meant to say was, that you would be a good, honourable, upright man; not a mean one. "Was it not?"

"Yes," said George, after an imperceptible hesitation. "Something of that sort."

"The boy did not express himself clearly, you see," said Mr. King, looking round on the rest. "He means well."

"Don't you ever talk about being a gentleman again, my lad," cried Farmer Apperley, with a sagacious nod. "It would make the neighbours think you were going on for bad ways. A gentleman is one who follows the hounds in white smalls and a scarlet coat, and goes to dinners and drinks wine, and never puts his hands to anything, but leads an idle life."

"That is not the sort of gentleman I meant," said George.

"It is to be hoped it's not," emphatically replied the farmer. "A man may do this if he has a good fat banker's book, George, but not else."

George made no remark. To have explained how very different his ideas of a gentleman were from those of Farmer Apperley's might have involved him in a long conversation. His silence was looked suspiciously upon by Mr. Chattaway.

"Where idle and roving notions are taken up, there's only one cure for them!" he remarked, in short, uncompromising tones. "And that is hard work."

But that George's spirit was subdued, he might have hotly answered that he had taken up neither idle nor roving notions. As it was, he sat in silence.

"I doubt whether it will be prudent to keep George at home," said Mrs. Ryle, speaking generally, but not to Mr. Chattaway. "He is too young to do much good on the farm. And there's John Pinder."

"John Pinder would do his best, no doubt," said Mr. Chattaway.

"The question is—if I do resolve to put George out, what can I put him to?" resumed Mrs. Ryle.

"Papa thought it best that I should stay on the farm," interposed George, his heart beating a shade quicker.

"He thought it best that I should exercise my own judgment in the matter," corrected Mrs. Ryle. "The worst is, it takes money to place a lad out," she added, looking at Farmer Apperley.

"It does that," replied the farmer.

"There's nothing like a trade for boys," said Mr. Chattaway, impressively. "They learn to get a good living, and they are kept out of mischief. It appears to me that Mrs. Ryle will have enough expense upon her hands, without the cost and keep of George being added to it. What service can so young a boy do the farm?"

"True," mused Mrs. Ryle, agreeing for once with Mr. Chattaway. "He could not be of much use at present. But the cost of placing him out?"

"Of course he could not," repeated Mr. Chattaway, with an eagerness which might have betrayed his motive, but that he coughed it down. "Perhaps I may be able to manage the putting him out for you, without cost. I know of an eligible place where there's a vacancy. The trade is a good one, too."

"I am not going to any trade," spoke George, looking Mr. Chattaway full in the face.

"You are going where Mrs. Ryle thinks fit that you shall go," returned Mr. Chattaway, in his hard, cold tones. "If I can get you into the establishment of Wall and Barnes without premium, it will be a first-rate thing for you."

All the blood in George Ryle's body seemed to rush to his face. Poor though they had become in point of money, trade

had been unknown in their family, and its sound in George's ears, as applied to himself, was something terrible. "That is a retail shop!" he cried, rising from his seat in a commotion.

"Well?" said Mr. Chattaway.

They remained gazing at each other. George with his changing face, flushing to crimson, fading to paleness; Mr. Chattaway with his composed, leaden one. His light eyes were sternly directed to George, but he did not glance at Mrs. Ryle. George was the first to speak.

"You shall never force me there, Mr. Chattaway."

Mr. Chattaway rose from his seat, took George by the shoulder, and turned him towards the window. The view did not take in much of the road to Barbrook; but a glimpse of it might be caught sight of here and there, winding along in the distance.

"Boy! do you remember what was carried down that road this afternoon—what you followed next to, with your younger brother? *He* said that you were not to cross your mother, but to obey her in all things. These are early moments to begin to turn against your father's dying charge."

George sat down, his brain throbbing, his heart beating. He did not see his duty very distinctly before him then. His father certainly had charged him to obey his mother's requests; he had left him entirely subject to her control; but George felt perfectly sure that his father would never have placed him in a retail shop; would not have allowed him to enter one.

Mr. Chattaway continued talking, but the boy heard him not. He was bending towards Mrs. Ryle, enlarging persuasively upon the advantages of the plan. He knew that Wall and Barnes had taken a boy into their house without premium, he said, and he believed he could induce them to waive it in George's case. He and Wall had been at school together; had passed many an impatient hour over the Latin, previously spoken of; and he often called in to have a chat with him in passing. Wall was a ten-thousand-pound man now; and George might become the same in time.

"How would you like to place Christopher at it, Mr. Chattaway?" asked George, his breast heaving rebelliously.

"Christopher!" indignantly responded Mr. Chattaway. "Christopher's heir to Trev—— Christopher isn't you," he concluded, cutting his first retort short. In the presence of

Mrs. Ryle it might not be altogether prudent to allude to the heirship of Cris to Trevlyn Hold.

The sum named conciliated the ear of Mr. Apperley, otherwise he had not listened with any favour to the plan. "Ten thousand pounds! And Wall but a middle-aged man! That's worth thinking of, George."

"I could never live in a shop; the close air, the confinement, would stifle me," said George, with a groan, putting aside for the moment his more forcible objections.

"You'd rather live in a thunder-storm, with the rain coming down on your head in bucketfuls," said Mr. Chattaway, sarcastically.

"A great deal," said George.

Farmer Apperley did not detect the irony of Mr. Chattaway's remark, or the bitterness of the answer. "You'll say next, boy, that you'd rather go for a sailor, and be exposed to the weather night and day, perched midway between sky and water!"

"So I would," was George's truthful answer. "Mamma! let me stay at the farm!" he cried, the nervous motion of his hands, the strained countenance, proving how momentous was the question to his grieved heart. "You do not know how useful I should soon become! And papa wished it."

Mrs. Ryle shook her head. "You are too young, George, to be of use. No."

George seemed to turn white; face, and heart, and all. He was approaching Mrs. Ryle with an imploring gesture; but Mr. Chattaway caught his arm and pushed him towards his seat again. "George, if I were you, I would not, on this day, cross my mother."

George glanced at her. Not a shade of love, of relenting, was there on her countenance. Cold, haughty, self-willed, it always was; but more cold, more haughty, more self-willed than usual now. He turned and left the room, his heart bursting, crossed the kitchen, and passed into the room whence his father had been carried only two hours before.

"Oh, papa! papa!" he sobbed, "if you were only back again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

INCIPIENT REBELLION.

BORNE down by the powers above him, George Ryle could only succumb to their will. Persuaded by the eloquence of Mr. Chattaway, Mrs. Ryle became convinced that placing George in the establishment of Wall and Barnes was the most appropriate thing that could be found for him, the most promising. The wonder was, that she should have brought herself to listen to Chattaway at all, or have entertained for a moment any proposal emanating from him. There could have been but one solution to the riddle: that of her own anxiety to get George settled in something away from home. Down deep in the heart of Mrs. Ryle, there was seated a deep sense of injury—of injustice—of wrong. It had been seated there ever since the death of Squire Trevlyn, influencing her actions, warping her temper—the question of the heirship of Trevlyn. Her father had bequeathed Trevlyn Hold to Chattaway; and Chattaway's son was now the heir; whereas, in her opinion, it was her son, Trevlyn Ryle, who should be occupying that desirable distinction. How Mrs. Ryle reconciled it to her conscience to ignore the claims of young Rupert Trevlyn, she best knew.

She did ignore them. She cast no more thought to Rupert in connection with the succession to Trevlyn, than if he had not been in existence. He had been barred from it by the Squire's will, and there it ended. But, failing heirs to her two dead brothers, it was *her* son who should have come in. Was she not the eldest daughter? What right had that worm, Chattaway, to have insinuated himself into the home of the Squire? into—it may be said—his heart? and so willed over to himself the inheritance?

A bitter fact to Mrs. Ryle; a fact which rankled in her heart by night and by day; a turning from the path of justice which she firmly intended to see turned back again. She saw not how it was to be accomplished; she knew not by what means it could be brought about; she divined not yet how she should help in it; but she was fully determined that it should be Trevlyn Ryle eventually to possess Trevlyn Hold. Never, Cris Chattaway.

A determination immutable as the rock; a purpose in the furtherance of which she never swerved nor faltered; there it lay in the archives of her most secret thoughts, a part and parcel of herself, not the less nourished because never spoken of. It may be, that in the death of her husband she saw her way to the end somewhat more clearly; that his removal was but one impediment taken from the path. She had never given utterance to her ambitious hopes for Trevlyn but once; and that had been to her husband. His reception of them was a warning to her never to speak of them again to him. No son of his, he said, should inherit Trevlyn Hold whilst the children of Joseph Trevlyn lived. If Chattaway chose to wrest their rights from them, to make his son Cris usurper after him, he, Mr. Ryle, could not hinder it; but his own boy Treve should never take act or part in so crying a wrong. So long as Rupert and Maude Trevlyn lived, he could never recognize other rights than theirs. From that time forward Mrs. Ryle held her tongue to her husband, as she had done to all else; but the roots of the project grew deeper and deeper in her heart, overspreading all its healthy fibres.

With this great destiny in view for Treve, it will readily be understood why she did not purpose bringing him up to any profession, or sending him out in the world. Her intention was, that Treve should live at home, as soon as his school-days were over; should be master of Trevlyn Farm, until he could become master of Trevlyn Hold. And for this reason, and this alone, she did not care to keep George with her. Trevlyn Farm might be a living for one son; it would not be for two: neither would two masters on it answer, although they were brothers. It is true, a thought at times crossed her whether it might not be well, in the interests of the farm, to retain George. He would soon become useful; he would be trustworthy; her interests would be his; and she felt dubious about confiding all management to John Pinder. But these suggestions were overruled by the thought that it would not be desirable for George to acquire a footing on the farm as its master, and then to be turned from it when the time came for Treve. As much for George's sake as for Treve's, she felt this; and she determined to place George at something away, where his interests and Treve's would not clash with each other.

Wall and Barnes were flourishing and respectable tradesmen, silk-mercers and linen-drapers; their establishment a large one, the oldest and best-conducted in Barmester. Had it been

suggested to Mrs. Ryle to place Treve there, she would have retorted in haughty indignation. And yet she was sending George!

What Mr. Chattaway's precise object could be in wishing to get George away from home, he alone knew. That he had such an object, there could be no shadow of doubt; and Mrs. Ryle's usual clear-sightedness must have been just then obscured, not to perceive it. Had his own interests or pleasure not been in some way involved, Chattaway would have taken no more heed as to what became of George, than he did of a clod of earth in that miserable field just rendered famous by the doings of the ill-conditioned bull. It was Chattaway who did it all. He negotiated with Wall and Barnes; he brought news of his success to Mrs. Ryle; he won over Farmer Apperley. Wall and Barnes had occasionally taken a youth without premium—the youth being expected to perform an unusual variety of work for the favour, to be at once an apprentice and a general factotum, at the beck and call of the establishment. Under those concessions, Wall and Barnes had been known to forego the usual premium; and this great boon was, through Mr. Chattaway, offered to George Ryle. Chattaway boasted of it; he enlarged upon his luck to George; and Mrs. Ryle—accepted it.

And George? Every pulse in his body coursed on in fiery indignation against the measure, every feeling of his heart rebelled at it. But, of opposition, he could make none: none that served him. Chattaway quietly put him down; Mrs. Ryle met all his remonstrances with the answer that she had *decided;* and Farmer Apperley laboured to convince him that it was a slice of good fortune, which any one (under the degree of a gentleman who rode to cover in a scarlet coat and white smalls) might jump at. Was not Wall, who had not yet reached his five-and-fortieth year, a ten-thousand-pound man? Turn where George would, there appeared to be no escape for him; no refuge. He must give up all the dreams of his life—not that the dreams had been as yet particularly defined—and become what his mind quite revolted at, what he knew he should never do anything but dislike bitterly. Had he been a less right-minded boy, less dutiful, he would have openly rebelled, have defied Chattaway, have declined to obey Mrs. Ryle. But that sort of rebellion George did not enter upon. The injunction of his dead father lay on him all too forcibly—"Obey and reverence your mother." And so the agreement was made, and

George Ryle was to go to Wall and Barnes, to be bound to them for seven years.

He stood leaning out of the casement window, the night before he was to enter; his aching brow bared to the cold air, cloudy as the autumn sky. Treve was fast asleep, in his own little bed in the far corner, shaded and sheltered by its curtains; but there was no such peaceful sleep for George. The thoughts to which he was giving vent were not altogether profitable ones; and certain questions which arose in his mind had been better left out of it.

"What *right* have they so to dispose of me?" he asked, alluding, it must be confessed, to the trio, Chattaway, Mrs. Ryle, and Mr. Apperley. "They *know* that if papa had lived, they would not have dared to urge my being put to it. I wonder what it will end in? I wonder whether I shall have to be at it always? It is *not* right to put a poor fellow to what he hates most of all in life, and what he'll hate for ever and for ever."

He gazed out at the low gloomy stretch of land lying under the night sky, looking as desolate as he was. "I'd rather go for a sailor!" broke from him in his despair; "I'd rather——"

A hot hand on his shoulder caused him to start and turn. There stood Nora.

"If I didn't say one of you boys was out of bed! What's this for, George? What are you doing?—trying to catch your death at the open window?"

"As good catch my death, for all I see, as live in this world, now," was George's answer.

"As good be a young simpleton and confess to it," retorted Nora, angrily. "What's the matter, George?"

"Why should they force me to that place at Barmester?" cried George, following up his grieved thoughts, rather than replying to Nora's question. "I wish Chattaway had been a thousand miles away first! What business has he to interfere about me?"

"I wish I was queen at odd moments, when work seems to be coming in seven ways at once, and only one pair of hands to do it," quoth Nora.

George turned from the window. "Nora, look here! You know I am a gentleman born: *is* it right to put me to it?"

Nora evaded an answer. She felt nearly as much as the boy did; but she saw no way of escape for him, and therefore would not oppose it.

There was no way of escape. Chattaway had decided it, Mrs. Ryle had acquiesced, and George was conducted to the new house, and took up his abode in it, rebellious feelings choking his heart, rebellious words rising to his lips.

But he did his utmost to beat the rebellion down. The charge of his dead father was ever before him—to render all duty and obedience to his step-mother—and George was mindful of it. He felt as one crushed under a whole weight of despair; he felt as one who had been rudely thrust from his proper place on earth: but he did constant battle with himself and his wrongs, and strove to make the best of it. How bitter the struggle was, none, save himself, knew; its remembrance would never die out from his memory.

The new work seemed terrible; not for its amount, though that was great; but from its nature. To help make up this parcel, to undo that; to take down these goods, to put up others. He ran to the post with letters—and that was a delightful phase of his life, compared with the rest of its phases—he carried out big bundles in brown paper; once a yard measure was added. He had to stand behind the counter, and roll and unroll goods, and measure tapes and ribbons, and bow and smile, and say "sir" and "ma'am." You will readily conceive what all this was to a proud boy. George might have run away from it altogether, but that the image of that table in the sitting-room, and of him who lay upon it, was ever before him, whispering to him to shrink not from his duty.

Not a moment of idleness was allowed to George; however the shopmen might enjoy leisure intervals when customers were few, there was no interval of leisure for him. He was the new scapegoat of the establishment; often doing the work that of right did not belong to him. It was perfectly well known to the young men that he had entered as a working apprentice; one who was not to be particular in work he did, or its quantity; and therefore he was not spared. He had taken his books with him, classics and others; he soon found that he might as well have left them at home. Not one minute in all the twenty-four hours could he devote to them. His hands were full of work until the last moment, up to bed-time; and no reading was permitted in the chambers. "Where is the use of my having gone to school at all?" he would sometimes ask himself. He would soon become as oblivious of Latin and Greek as Mr. Chattaway could wish; and his prospects of adding to his

stock of learning were such as would have gladdened Farmer Apperley's heart.

One Saturday, when George had been there about three weeks, and when the day was drawing near for the indentures to be signed, binding him to the business for years, Mr. Chattaway rode up in the very costume that was the subject of Farmer Apperley's ire, when worn by those who ought not to afford to wear it. The hounds had met that day near Barmester. had found their fox, and been led a round-about chase, the fox bringing them back to their starting-point, to resign his brush; and the master of Trevlyn Hold, on his splashed but fine hunter, in his scarlet coat, white smalls and boots, splashed also, rode through Barmester on his return, and pulled up at the door of Wall and Barnes. Giving his horse to a street boy to hold, he entered the shop, whip in hand.

The scarlet coat, looming in unexpectedly, caused a flutter in the establishment. Saturday was market-day, and the shop was unusually full. The customers looked round in admiration, the shopmen with envy. Little chance was there, thought those hard-worked, unambitious young men, that they should ever wear a scarlet coat, and ride to cover on a blood hunter. Mr. Chattaway, of Trevlyn Hold, was an object of consideration just then. He shook hands with Mr. Wall, who came forward from some remote region; he turned and shook hands condescendingly with George.

"And how does he suit?" blandly inquired Mr. Chattaway. "Can you make anything of him?"

"He does his best," was the reply of Mr. Wall. "Awkward at present; but we have had others who have been as awkward at first, I think, and who have turned out valuable assistants in the long-run. I am willing to take him."

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Chattaway. "I'll call in and tell Mrs. Ryle. Wednesday is the day he is to be bound, I think?"

"Wednesday," assented Mr. Wall.

"I shall be here. I am glad to take this trouble off Mrs. Ryle's hands. I hope you like your employment, George."

"I do not like it at all," replied George. And he spoke out fearlessly, although his master stood by.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Chattaway, with a false-sounding laugh. "Well, I did not suppose you would like it too well at first."

Mr. Wall laughed also, a hearty, kindly laugh. "Never yet

was there an apprentice liked his work too well," said he. "It's their first taste of the labour of life. George Ryle will like it better when he is used to it."

"I never shall," thought George. But he supposed it would not quite do to say so; neither would it answer any end. Mr. Chattaway shook hands with Mr. Wall, gave a nod to George, and he and his scarlet coat loomed out again.

"Will it last my life?—will this dreadful slavery last my life?" burst from George Ryle's rebellious heart.

CHAPTER IX.

EMANCIPATION.

On the following day, Sunday, George walked home: Mrs. Ryle had told him he might come and spend the day at the Farm. All were at church except Molly, and George went to meet them. Several groups were coming along; and presently he met Cris Chattaway, Rupert Trevlyn, and his brother Treve, walking together.

"Where's mamma?" asked George.

"She stepped indoors with Mrs. Apperley," answered Treve. "She said she'd follow me on directly."

"How do you relish linen-drapering?" asked Cris Chattaway, in a chaffing sort of manner, as George turned with them. "Horrid, isn't it?"

"There's only about one thing in this world more horrid," answered George.

"My father said you expressed fears before you went that you'd find the air at the shop stifling," went on Cris, not asking what the one exception might be. "Is it hopelessly so?"

"Isn't it!" returned George. "The black hole in Calcutta must have been cool and pleasant in comparison with it."

"I wonder you are alive," continued Cris.

"I wonder I am," said George, equably. "I was quite off in a faint one day, when the shop was at the fullest. They thought they must have sent for you, Cris; that the sight of you might bring me to again."

"There you go!" exclaimed Treve Ryle. "I wonder it

you two *could* let each other alone if you were bribed to do it?"

"Cris began it," said George.

"I didn't," said Cris. "I *should* like to see you at your work, though, George! I'll come some day. The Squire paid you a visit yesterday afternoon, he told us. He says you are getting to be quite the polite cut; one can't serve out yards of calico without it, you know."

George Ryle's face burnt. He knew that Mr. Chattaway had been speaking of him with ridicule at Trevlyn Hold, in connection with his new occupation. "It would be a more fitting situation for you than for me, Cris," said he. "And now you hear it."

Cris laughed scornfully. "Perhaps it might, if I wanted one. The master of Trevlyn won't need to go into a linen-draper's shop, George Ryle."

"Look here, Cris. That shop is horrid, and I don't mind telling you that I find it so; that not an hour in the day goes over my head but I wish myself out of it; but I would rather bind myself to it for twenty years, than be master of Trevlyn Hold, if I came to it as you will come to it—by wrong."

Cris broke into a shrill, derisive whistle. It was being prolonged to an apparently interminable length, when he found himself rudely seized from behind.

"Is that the way you walk home from church, Christopher Chattaway? Whistling!"

Cris looked round and saw Miss Trevlyn. "Goodness, Aunt Diana! are you going to shake me?"

"Walk along as a gentleman should, then," returned Miss Trevlyn.

She went on. Miss Chattaway walked by her side, not deigning to cast a word or a look to the boys as she swept past. Gliding up behind them, holding the hand of Maude, was gentle Mrs. Chattaway. They all wore black silk dresses and white silk bonnets: the apology for mourning assumed for Mr. Ryle. But the gowns were not new; and the bonnets were the bonnets of the past summer, with the coloured flowers taken out.

Mrs. Chattaway slackened her pace, and George found himself at her side. She seemed to linger, as if she would speak with him unheard by the rest.

"Are you pretty well, my dear?" were her first words. "You look taller and thinner, and your face is pale."

"I shall look paler ere I have been much longer in the shop, Mrs. Chattaway."

Mrs. Chattaway glanced her head timidly round with the air of one who fears she may be heard. But they were alone now.

"Are you grieving, George?"

"How can I help it?" he passionately answered, feeling that he could open his heart to Mrs. Chattaway, as he could to no one else in the wide world. "Is it a proper thing to put me to, dear Mrs. Chattaway?"

"I said it was not," she murmured. "I said to Diana that I wondered Maude should place you there."

"It was not mamma; it was not mamma so much as Mr. Chattaway," he answered, forgetting possibly that it was Mr. Chattaway's wife to whom he spoke. "At times, do you know, I feel as though I would almost rather be—be——"

"Be what, dear?"

"Be dead, than stop."

"Hush, George!" she cried, almost with a shudder. "Random figures of speech never do any good! I have learnt it. In the old days, when——"

She suddenly broke off what she was saying and glided forward without further notice. She caught in hers, as she passed, the hand of Maude, who was then walking by the side of the boys. George looked round for the cause of desertion, and found it in Mr. Chattaway. That gentleman was coming along with a quick step, one of his younger children in his hand.

The Chattaways turned off towards Trevlyn Hold, and George walked on with Treve. "Do you know how things are going on at home, Treve, between mamma and Chattaway?" asked George.

"Chattaway's a miserable screw," was Treve's answer. "He'd like to grind down the world, and he doesn't let a chance escape him of doing it. Mamma says it's a dreadful sum he has put upon her to pay yearly, and she does not see how the farm will do it, besides keeping us. I wish we were clear of him! I wish I was as big as you, George! I'd work the farm barren, I'd work my arms off, but what I'd get together the money to pay him!"

"They won't let me work," said George. "They have thrust me away from the farm."

"I wish you were back at it; I know that! Nothing goes on as it used to, when you were there and papa was alive. Nora's cross. and mamma's cross; and I have not a

soul to speak to. What do you think Chattaway did this week?"

"Something mean, I suppose!"

"Mean! We killed a pig, and while it was being cut up, Chattaway marched in. 'That's fine meat, John Pinder,' said he, when he had looked at it a bit; 'as fine as I ever saw. That was a good plan of Mr. Ryle's, keeping his pigs clean. I should like a bit of this meat; I think I'll take a sparerib; and it can go against Mrs. Ryle's account with me.' With that, he laid hold of a fine sparerib, the finest of the two, and called a boy who was standing by, and sent him up with it at once to Trevlyn Hold. What do you think of that?"

"Think! That it's just the thing Chattaway would be doing every day of his life, if he could. Mamma should have sent for the meat back again."

"And anger Chattaway? It might be all the worse for us if she did."

"Is it not early to begin pig-killing?"

"Yes. John Pinder killed this one on his own authority; never so much as asking mamma. She was so angry. She told him, if ever he acted for himself again, without knowing what her pleasure might be, she should discharge him. But it strikes me John Pinder is fond of doing things on his own head," concluded Treve, sagaciously; "and that he will do them, in spite of mamma, now there's no master over him."

The day soon passed. George told his mamma how terribly he disliked being where he was placed; worse than that, how completely unsuited he believed he was to the business. Mrs. Ryle coldly said we all had to put up with what we disliked, and that he would get reconciled to it in time. There was evidently no hope for him; and he returned to Barmester at night, feeling that there was not any.

On the following afternoon, Monday, some one in deep mourning entered the shop of Wall and Barnes, and asked if she could speak to Master Ryle. George was at the upper end of the shop. A box of lace had been accidentally upset on the floor, and he had been called to set it to rights. Behind him hung two shawls, and, hidden by those shawls, was a private desk, belonging to Mr. Wall. The visitor approached George and saluted him.

"Well, you *are* busy!"

George lifted his head at the well-known voice—Nora's. Her attention appeared chiefly attracted by the box of lace.

"What a mess it is in! And you don't go a bit handy to work, towards putting it tidy."

"I shall never be handy at this sort of work. Oh, Nora! I cannot tell you how I dislike it!" he exclaimed, with a burst of feeling that betrayed its own pain. "I would rather be with papa in his coffin!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Nora.

"It is not nonsense. I shall never care for anything again in life, now they have put me here. It was Chattaway's doing; you know it was, Nora. Mamma never would have thought of it. When I remember that papa would have objected to this for me just as strongly as I object to it myself, I can hardly *bear* my thoughts. I think how he will be grieved, if he can see what goes on in this world. You know he said something about that when he was dying—the dead retaining their consciousness of the doings here."

"Have you objected to be bound?"

"I have not objected. I don't mean to object. Papa charged me to obey Mrs. Ryle, and not cross her—and I won't forget that; therefore I shall remain, and do my duty to the very best of my power. But it was a cruel thing to put me to it. Chattaway has some motive for getting me off the farm; there's no doubt of it. I shall stay if—if——"

"Why do you hesitate?" asked Nora.

"Well, there are moments," he answered, "when a fear comes over me whether I *can* bear on, and stay. You see, Nora, it is Chattaway and mamma's will balancing against all the hopes and prospects of my life. I know that my father charged me to obey mamma; but, on the other hand, I know that if he were alive he would be pained to see me here; would be the first to take me away. When these thoughts come forcibly upon me, I doubt whether I can stay."

"You must not encourage them," said Nora.

"I don't think I encourage them. But they come in spite of me. The fear comes; it is always coming. Don't say anything to mamma, Nora. I have made my mind up to stop, and I'll try hard to do it. As soon as I am out of my time I'll go off to India, or somewhere, and forget the old life in a new one."

"My goodness!" uttered Nora. But having no good arguments at hand, she thought it as well to leave him, and took her departure.

The day arrived on which George was to be bound. It was

a gloomy November day, and the tall chimneys of Barmester rose dark and dull and dismal against the outlines of the grey sky. The previous night had been hopelessly wet, and the mud in the streets was ankle-deep. People who had no urgent occasion to be abroad, drew closer to their comfortable firesides, and wished the dreary month of November was over.

George stood at the door of the shop, having snatched a moment to come to it. A slender, handsome boy, with his earnest eyes and his dark chestnut hair, looking too gentlemanly to belong to that shop. Belong to it! Ere the stroke of another hour should have been told on the dial of the church clock of Barmester, he would be irrevocably bound to it—have become as much a part and parcel of it as the silks that were displayed in its windows, as the shawls which exhibited themselves in all their gay and gaudy colours. As he stood there, he was feeling that no fate on earth was ever so hopelessly dark as his: he was feeling that he had no friend either in earth or heaven.

One, two; three, four! chimed out over the town through the leaden atmosphere. Half-past eleven! It was the hour fixed for signing the indentures which would bind him to servitude for years; and he, George Ryle, looked to the extremity of the street, expecting the appearance of Mr. Chattaway.

Considering the manner in which Mr. Chattaway had urged on the binding, George had thought he would be half-an-hour before the time, rather than five minutes beyond it. He looked eagerly to the extremity of the street, at the same time dreading the sight he sought for.

"George Ryle!" The call came ringing on his ears in a sharp, imperative tone, and he turned in obedience to it. He was told to "measure those trimmings, and card them."

An apparently interminable task. About fifty pieces of ribbon-trimmings, some scores of yards in each piece, all off their cards. George sighed as he singled out one and began upon it—he was terribly awkward at the work.

It advanced slowly. In addition to the inaptitude of his fingers for the task, to his intense natural distaste of it—and so intense was that distaste, that the ribbons felt as if they burnt his fingers—in addition to this, there were frequent interruptions. Any of the shopmen who wanted help called to George Ryle; and once he was told to open the door for a lady who was departing. On that cold, gloomy day, the doors were kept closed.

As the lady walked away, George leaned out, and took another gaze. Mr. Chattaway was not in sight. The clocks were then striking a quarter to twelve. A feeling of something like hope, but vague and faint and terribly unreal, dawned over his heart. Could the delay augur good for him?—was it possible that there could be any change?

How unreal it was, the next moment proved. There came round that far corner a horseman at a hand-gallop, his horse's hoofs scattering the mud in all directions. It was Mr. Chattaway. He reined up at the private door of Wall and Barnes, dismounted, and consigned his horse to his groom, who had followed at the same pace. The false, faint hope was over; and George walked back to his cards and his trimmings, as one from whom all spirit has gone out.

A message was brought to him almost immediately by one of the house servants: Squire Chattaway waited in the drawing-room. Squire Chattaway had sent the message himself, not to George, to Mr. Wall. But Mr. Wall was engaged at the moment with a gentleman, and he sent the message on to George. George went upstairs.

Mr. Chattaway, in his top-boots and spurs, stood warming his hands over the fire. He had not removed his hat. When the door opened, he raised his hand to do so; but seeing it was only George who entered, he left it on. He was much given to the old-fashioned use of boots and spurs when he rode abroad.

"Well, George, how are you?"

George went up to the fireplace. On the centre table, as he passed it, lay an official-looking parchment rolled up, a large inkstand with writing materials by its side. George had not the least doubt that the parchment was no other than that formidable document, yclept Indentures.

Mr. Chattaway had taken up the same opinion. He extended his riding-whip towards the parchment, and spoke in a significant tone, turning his eye on George.

"Ready?"

"It is no use attempting to say I am not," replied George. "I would rather you had forced me to be one of the lowest boys in your coal-mines, Mr. Chattaway."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

He was pointing now to the upper part of the sleeve of George's jacket. Some ravellings of cotton had collected there unnoticed. George took them off, and put them on the fire.

"It is only a badge of my trade, Mr. Chattaway."

Whether Mr. Chattaway detected the bitterness of the words—not the bitterness of sarcasm, but of despair—cannot be told. He laughed pleasantly, and before the laugh was over, Mr. Wall came in. Mr. Chattaway removed his hat now, and laid it with his riding-whip beside the indentures.

"I am later than I ought to be," observed Mr. Chattaway, as they shook hands. "The fact is, I was on the point of starting, when my manager at the colliery came up. His business was important, and it kept me the best part of an hour."

"Plenty of time; plenty of time," said Mr. Wall. "Take a seat."

They sat down near the table. George, apparently unnoticed, remained standing on the hearthrug. A few minutes were spent conversing on different subjects, and then Mr. Chattaway turned to the parchment.

"These are the indentures, I presume?"

"Yes."

"I called on Mrs. Ryle last evening. She requested me to say that should her signature be required, as the boy's nearest relative and guardian—as his only parent, it may be said, in fact—she should be ready to affix it at any given time."

"It will not be required," replied Mr. Wall, in a clear voice. "I shall not take George Ryle as an apprentice."

A stolid look of surprise struggled to Mr. Chattaway's leaden face. At first, he scarcely seemed to take in the full meaning of the words. "Not take him?" he rejoined, staring helplessly.

"No. It is a pity these were made out," continued Mr. Wall, taking the indentures in his hand. "It has been so much time and parchment wasted. However, that is not of great consequence. I will be at the loss, as the refusal comes from my side."

Mr. Chattaway found his tongue—found it volubly. "Won't he do? Is he not suitable? I—I don't understand this."

"Not at all suitable, in my opinion," answered Mr. Wall.

Mr. Chattaway turned sharply upon George, a strangely evil look in his dull grey eye, an ominous curl in his thin, dry lip. Mr. Wall likewise turned; but on his face there was a reassuring smile.

And George? George stood there as one in a dream; his face changing to perplexity, his eyes strained to wonder, his fingers intertwined with the nervous grasp of emotion.

"What have you been guilty of, sir, to cause this change of intentions?" shouted Mr. Chattaway.

"He has not been guilty of anything," interposed Mr. Wall, who appeared to be enjoying a smile at George's astonishment and Mr. Chattaway's discomfiture. "Don't blame the boy. So far as I know and believe, he has striven to do his best ever since he has been here."

"Then why won't you take him? You *will* take him," added Mr. Chattaway, in a more agreeable voice, as the idea dawned upon him that Mr. Wall had been joking.

"Indeed, I will not. If Mrs. Ryle offered me a thousand pounds premium with him, I should not take him."

Mr. Chattaway's small eyes opened to their utmost width. "And why would you not?"

"Because, knowing what I know now, I believe that I should be committing an injustice upon the boy; an injustice which nothing could repair. To condemn a youth to pass the best years of his life at an uncongenial pursuit, to make the pursuit his calling, is a cruel injustice, wherever it is knowingly inflicted. I myself was a victim to it."

"My boy," added Mr. Wall, laying his hand on George's shoulder, "you have a marked distaste to the mercery business. Is it not so? Speak out fearlessly. Don't regard me as your master—I shall never be that, you hear—but as your friend."

"Yes, I have," replied George.

"You think it a cruel piece of injustice to have put you to it: you shall never more feel an interest in life; you'd as soon be with poor Mr. Ryle in his coffin! And when you are out of your time, you mean to start for India or some out-of-the-world place, and begin life afresh!"

George was too much confused to answer. His face turned scarlet. Undoubtedly Mr. Wall had overheard his conversation with Nora.

Mr. Chattaway was looking red and angry. When his face did turn red, it presented a charming brick-dust hue. "It is only scamps who take a dislike to what they are put to," he exclaimed. "And their dislike is all pretence."

"I differ from you in both propositions," replied Mr. Wall. "At any rate, I do not think it the case with your nephew."

Mr. Chattaway's brick-dust turned to green. "He is no nephew of mine. What next will you say, Wall?"

"Your step-nephew, then, to be correct," equably rejoined Mr. Wall. "You remember when we left school together, you

and I, and began to turn our thoughts to the business of life? Your father wished you to go into the bank as clerk, you know; and mine——"

"But he did not get his wish, more's the luck," again interposed Mr. Chattaway, not pleased at the allusion. "A poor start in life that would have been for the future Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

"Pooh!" rejoined Mr. Wall, in a good-tempered, matter-of-fact tone. "You did not expect then to be exalted to Trevlyn Hold. Nonsense, Chattaway! We are old friends, you know. But, let me continue. I overheard a certain conversation of this boy's with Nora Dickson, and it seemed to bring my own early life back to me. With every word that he spoke, I had a fellow feeling. My father insisted that I should follow the same business that he was in; this. He carried on a successful trade for years, in this very house, and nothing would do but I must succeed him in it. In vain I urged my repugnance to it, my dislike; in vain I said I had formed other views for myself; I was not listened to. In those days it was not the fashion for sons to run counter to their fathers' will; at least, such was my experience; and into the business I came. I have reconciled myself to it by dint of time and habit; liked it, I never have; and I have always felt that it was—as I heard this boy express it—a cruel wrong to force me into it. You cannot, therefore, be surprised that I decline so to force another. I will never do it knowingly."

"You decline absolutely to take him?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"Absolutely and positively. He can remain in the house a few days longer if it will suit his convenience, or he can leave to-day. I am not displeased with you," added Mr. Wall, turning to George, and holding out his hand. "We shall part good friends."

George seized it and grasped it, his countenance glowing, a whole world of gratitude shining from his eyes as he lifted them to Mr. Wall. "I shall always think you have been the best friend I ever had, sir, next to my father."

"I hope it will prove so, George. I hope you will find some pursuit in life more congenial to you than this."

Mr. Chattaway took his hat and his whip from the table. "This will be fine news for your mother, sir!" cried he, severely, to George.

"It may turn out well for her," replied George, boldly. "My

belief is that the farm never would have got along with John Pinder for its manager."

"You think you would make a better?" said Mr. Chattaway, his thin lip curling.

"I can be true to her, at any rate," said George. "And I can have my eyes about me."

"Good morning," resumed Mr. Chattaway to Mr. Wall, putting out unwillingly the tips of two of his fingers.

Mr. Wall laughed as he grasped them. "I do not see why you should be vexed, Mr. Chattaway. The boy is no son of yours. For myself, all I can say is, that I have been actuated by motives of regard for his interest."

"It remains to be proved whether it will be for his interest," coldly rejoined Mr. Chattaway. "Were I his mother, and this check were dealt out to me, I should send him off to break stones on the road. Good morning, Wall. And I beg you will not bring me here again upon a fool's errand."

George went into the shop, to get from it some personal trifles that he had left there. He deemed it well to depart at once, and carry, himself, the news home to Mrs. Ryle. The cards and trimmings lay in the unfinished state that he had left them. What a change, that moment and this! One or two of the employés noticed his radiant countenance.

"Has anything happened?" they asked.

"Yes," answered George. "I have been suddenly lifted into elysium."

He started on his way, leaving his things to be sent after him. His footsteps scarcely touched the ground. Not a rough ridge of the road, felt he; not a sharp stone; not a hill. Only when he turned in at the gate did he remember there was his mother's displeasure to be met and grappled with.

Nora gave a shriek when he entered the house. "*George!* Whatever brings you here?"

"Where's mamma?" was George's only answer.

"She's in the best parlour," said Nora. "And I can tell you that she's not in the best of humours just now, so I'd advise you not to go in."

"What about?" asked George, taking it for granted that she had heard the news about himself, and that that was the grievance. But he was agreeably undeceived.

"It's about John Pinder. He has been having two of the meads ploughed up, and he never asked the missis first. She *is* angry."

"Has Chattaway been here to see mamma, Nora?"

"He came up here on horseback in a desperate hurry half-an-hour ago; but she was out on the farm, so he said he'd call again. It was through her going abroad this morning that she discovered what they were about with the fields. She says she thinks John Pinder must be going out of his mind, to take things upon himself in the way he is doing."

George bent his steps to the drawing-room. Mrs. Ryle was seated before her desk, writing a note. The expression of her face as she looked up at George between the white lappets of her widow's cap, was resolutely severe. It changed to astonishment.

Strange to say, she was writing to Mr. Wall to stop the signature of the indentures, or to desire that they might be cancelled if signed. She could not do without George at home, she said; and she told him why she could not.

"Mamma," said George, "will you be angry if I tell you something that has struck me in all this?"

"Tell it," said Mrs. Ryle.

"I feel quite certain that Chattaway has been acting with a motive; that he has some private reason for wishing to get me away from home. That's what he has been working for; otherwise he would never have troubled himself about me. It is not in his nature."

Mrs. Ryle gazed at George steadfastly, as if weighing his words, and presently knitted her brow. George could read her countenance tolerably well. He felt sure she had arrived at a similar conclusion, and that it irritated her. He resumed.

"It looks bad for you, mamma; but you must not think I say this selfishly. Twenty times I have asked myself the question, Why does he wish me away? And I can only think that he would like the farm to go to rack and ruin, so that you may be driven off it."

"Nonsense, George."

"Well, I can't tell what else it can be."

"If so, he is defeated," said Mrs. Ryle. "You will take your place as master of the farm to-day, George, under me. Deferring to me in all things, you understand; giving no orders on your own responsibility, taking my pleasure upon the merest trifle."

"I should not think of doing otherwise," replied George. "I will do my best for you in all ways, mamma. You will soon see how useful I can be."

"Very well. But I may as well mention one thing to you. When Treve shall be old enough, it is he who will be master here, and you must resign the place to him. It is not that I wish to set the younger of your father's sons unjustly above the head of the elder. This farm will be a living but for one of you; barely that; and I prefer that Treve should have it; he is my own son. We will endeavour to find a better farm for you, George, before that time shall come."

"Just as you please," said George, cheerfully. "Now that I am emancipated from that dreadful nightmare, my prospects look very bright to me. I'll do the best I can on the farm, remembering that I do it for Treve's future benefit; not for mine. Something else will turn up for me, no doubt, before I'm ready for it."

"Which will not be for some years to come," said Mrs. Ryle, feeling pleased with the boy's cheerful, acquiescent spirit. "Treve will not be old enough for——"

Mrs. Ryle was interrupted. The door had opened, and there appeared Mr. Chattaway, showing himself in. Nora never affected to be too courteous to that gentleman; and on his coming to the house to ask for Mrs. Ryle a second time, she had curtly answered that Mrs. Ryle was in the best parlour (the more familiar name for the drawing-room in the farm-house), and allowed him to find his own way to it.

Mr. Chattaway looked surprised at seeing George; he had not bargained for his arriving home so soon. Extending his hand towards him, he turned to Mrs. Ryle.

"There's a dutiful son for you! You hear what he has done?—returned on your hands as a bale of worthless goods."

"Yes, I hear that Mr. Wall has declined to take him," was her composed answer. "It has happened for the best. When he arrived just now, I was writing to Mr. Wall, requesting that he might *not* be bound."

"And why?" asked Mr. Chattaway, in considerable amazement.

"I find that I am unable to do without him," said Mrs. Ryle, her tone harder and firmer than ever; her eyes, stern and steady, thrown full on Chattaway. "I have tried the experiment, and it has failed. I cannot do without one by my side devoted to my interests; and John Pinder cannot get on without a master."

"And do you think you'll find what you want in him!—in that inexperienced schoolboy?" burst forth Mr. Chattaway.

"I do," replied Mrs. Ryle, her tone so significantly decisive as to be almost offensive. "He takes his standing from this day as master of Trevlyn Farm; subject only to me."

"I wish you joy of him!" angrily returned Chattaway. "But you must understand, Mrs. Ryle, that your having a boy at the head of affairs will oblige me to look more keenly after my interests."

"My arrangements with you are settled," she said. "So long as I fulfil my part, that is all that concerns you, James Chattaway."

"You'll not fulfil it, if you put him at the head of things."

"When I fail, you can come here and tell me of it. Until then, I would prefer that you should not intrude on Trevlyn Farm."

She rang the bell violently as she spoke, and Molly, who was passing along the passage, immediately appeared. Mrs. Ryle extended her hand imperiously, the forefinger pointed out.

"The door for Mr. Chattaway."

CHAPTER X.

MADAM'S ROOM.

LEADING out of Mrs. Chattaway's dressing-room was a comfortable apartment, fitted up as a sitting-room, its hangings of chintz, and its furniture maple-wood. It was called in the household "Madam's Room," and it was where Mrs. Chattaway frequently sat. Yes; the house and the neighbourhood accorded her readily the title which usage had long given to the mistress of Trevlyn Hold: but they would not give that of "Squire" to her husband. I wish particularly to repeat this. Strive for it as he would, force his personal servants to observe the title as he did, he could not get it recognized or adopted. When a written invitation came to the Hold—a rare event, for the good old-fashioned custom of inviting verbally was chiefly followed there—it would be worded, "Mr. and Madam Chattaway," and Chattaway's face would turn green as he read it. No, never! He enjoyed the substantial good of being proprietor of Trevlyn Hold, he received its revenues, he held sway as its lord and master; but its honours were not given to him. It was so much gall and wormwood to Chattaway.

Mrs. Chattaway stood at this window on that dull morning in November mentioned in the last chapter, her eyes strained outwards. What was she gazing at? Those lodge chimneys? —The dark and almost bare trees that waved to and fro in the wintry wind?—The extensive landscape stretching out in the distance, not fine to-day, but dull and cheerless?—Or on the shifting clouds in the grey skies? Not on any of these; her eyes, though apparently bent on all, in reality saw nothing. They were fixed in vacancy; buried, like her thoughts, inwards.

She wore a muslin gown with dark purple spots upon it; her collar was fastened with a bow of black ribbon, her sleeves were confined with black ribbons at the wrist. She was passing a finger under one of these wrist-ribbons, round and round, as if the ribbon were tight; in point of fact, it was a proof of her abstraction, and she knew not that she was doing it. Her smooth hair fell in curls on her fair face, and her blue eyes were bright as with a slight touch of inward fever.

Some one opened the door, and peeped in. It was Maude Trevlyn. Her frock was of the same material as Mrs. Chattaway's gown, and a sash of black ribbon encircled her waist. Mrs. Chattaway did not turn, and Maude came forward.

"Are you well to-day, Aunt Edith?"

"Not very, dear." Mrs. Chattaway took the pretty young head within her arm as she answered, and fondly stroked the bright curls. "You have been crying, Maude!"

Maude shook back her curls with a smile, as if she meant to be brave; to make light of the accusation. "Cris and Octave went on so shamefully, Aunt Edith, ridiculing George Ryle; and when I took his part, Cris hit me here"—pointing to the side of her face—"a sharp blow. It was stupid of me to cry, though."

"Cris did?" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway.

"I know I provoked him," candidly acknowledged Maude. "I'm afraid I flew into a passion; and you know, Aunt Edith, I don't mind what I say when I do that. I told Cris that he would be placed at something not half as good as a linen-draper's some time, for he'd want a living when Rupert came into Trevlyn Hold."

"Maude! Maude! hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway in a tone of terror. "You must not say that."

"I know I must not, Aunt Edith; I know it is wrong; wrong to think it, and foolish to say it. It was my temper. I am very sorry."

She nestled close to Mrs. Chattaway, caressing and penitent.

Mrs. Chattaway stooped and kissed her, a strangely-marked expression of tribulation, shrinking and hopeless, upon her countenance.

"Oh, Maude! I am so ill!"

Maude felt awed; and somewhat puzzled. "Ill, Aunt Edith?"

"There is an illness of mind worse than that of body, Maude; inward trouble is more wearing than outward, child! I feel as though I should sink under my weight of care. Sometimes I wonder why I am kept on earth."

"Oh, Aunt Edith! You——"

A knock at the room door. It was followed by the entrance of a female servant's face. She could not see Mrs. Chattaway; only Maude.

"Is Miss Diana here, Miss Maude?"

"No. Only Madam."

"What is it, Phœbe?" called out Mrs. Chattaway.

The girl came in now. "Master Cris wants to know if he can take out the gig, ma'am?"

"I cannot tell anything about it," said Mrs. Chattaway. "You must ask Miss Diana. Maude, see; that is your Aunt Diana's step on the stairs now."

Miss Trevlyn came in. "The gig?" she repeated. "No; Cris cannot take it. Go and tell him so, Maude. Phœbe, return to your work."

Maude ran away, and Phœbe went off grumbling, not aloud, but to herself; no one dared grumble in the hearing of Miss Trevlyn. She had spoken in a sharp tone to Phœbe, and the girl did not like sharp tones when addressed to herself. As Miss Trevlyn sat down opposite Mrs. Chattaway, the feverish state of that lady's countenance struck upon her attention.

"What is the matter, Edith?"

Mrs. Chattaway buried her elbow on the sofa-cushion, and pressed her hand on her face, half covering it, before she spoke. "I cannot get over this business," she answered in low tones. "To-day—perhaps naturally—I am feeling it more than is good for me. It makes me ill, Diana."

"What business?" asked Miss Trevlyn.

"This apprenticing of George Ryle."

"Nonsense," said Miss Diana.

"It is not the proper thing for him, Diana; you admitted yesterday that it was not. The boy says that it is the blighting of his whole future life: and I feel that it is nothing less. I

could not sleep last night for thinking of it. Once I dozed off, and fell into an ugly dream," she shivered. "I thought Mr. Ryle came to me, and asked whether it was not enough that we had heaped care upon him in life, and then sent him to his death, but must also pursue his son."

"You always were weak, you know, Edith," was the composed rejoinder of Miss Trevlyn. "Why Chattaway should be interfering with George Ryle, I cannot understand; but it surely need not give concern to you. The proper person to put a veto on his being placed at Barmester, as he is being placed, was Maude Ryle. If she did not see fit to do it, it is no business of ours."

"It seems to me as if he had no one to stand up for him. It seems," added Mrs. Chattaway, with more of passion in her tone, "as if his father must be looking on at us, and condemning us from his grave."

"If you will worry yourself over it, you must," was the rejoinder of Miss Trevlyn. "It is very foolish, Edith, and it can do no earthly good. He is bound by this time, and the thing is irrevocable."

"Perhaps that is the reason—because it is irrevocable—that it presses upon me to-day with a greater weight. It has made me think of the past, Diana," she added in a whisper. "Of that other wrong, which I cheat myself sometimes into forgetting; a wrong——"

"Be silent!" imperatively interrupted Miss Trevlyn, and the next moment Cris Chattaway bounded into the room.

"What's the reason I can't have the gig?" he began. "Who says I can't have it?"

"I do," said Miss Trevlyn.

Cris insolently turned from her, and walked up to Mrs. Chattaway. "May I not take the gig, mamma?"

If there was one thing irritated the sweet temper of Mrs. Chattaway, it was being appealed to against any decision of Diana's. She knew that she possessed no power; that she was a nonentity in the house; and though she bowed to her dependency, and had no resource but to bow to it, she did not like it to be brought palpably before her.

"Don't apply to me, Cris. I know nothing about things downstairs; I cannot say one way or the other. The horses and vehicles are specially the things that your papa will not have meddled with. Do you remember taking out the dog-cart without leave, and the result?"

Cris looked angry; perhaps the reminiscence was not agreeable. Miss Diana interfered.

"You will *not* take out the gig, Cris. I have said it."

"Then see if I don't walk! And if I am not home to dinner, Aunt Diana, you can just tell the Squire that the thanks are due to you."

"Where is it that you wish to go?" asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"I am going to Barmester. I want to wish that fellow joy of his indentures," added Cris, a glow of triumph lighting his face. "He is bound by this time. I wonder the Squire is not back again!"

The Squire was back again. As Cris spoke, his tread was heard on the stairs, and he came into the room. Cris was too full of his own concerns to note the expression of Mr. Chattaway's face.

"Papa, may I take out the gig? I want to go to Barmester, to pay a visit of congratulation to George Ryle."

"No, you will not take out the gig," said Mr. Chattaway, the allusion exciting his vexation almost beyond bearing.

Cris thought he might have been misunderstood. Cris deemed that his proclaimed intention would find favour with Mr. Chattaway.

"I suppose you have been binding that fellow, papa. I want to go and ask him how he likes it."

"No, sir, I have not been binding him," thundered Mr. Chattaway. "What's more, he is not going to be bound. He has left it, and is at home again."

Cris gave a blank stare of amazement, and Mrs. Chattaway let her hands fall silently upon her lap, and heaved a gentle sigh, as if some great good had come to her.

CHAPTER XI.

LIKE THE SLIPPERS IN EASTERN STORY.

None of us can stand still in life. Everything rolls on its course towards the end of all things. The world goes on, and its events; we go on, in one universal progress: nothing can arrest itself—nothing can be diverted from the appointed laws of advancement.

In noting down a family's or a life's history, it must of neces-

sity occur that periods in it will be differently marked. Years at times will glide quietly on, giving forth few events worthy of record; and again, it will happen that occurrences, varied and momentous, will be crowded into an incredibly short space. Events, sufficient one would think to fill up the allotted life of man—threescore years and ten—will follow one another in rapid succession in the course of as many months; nay, of as many days.

Thus it was with the history of the Trevlyns, and those connected with them. After the lamentable death of Mr. Ryle, the new agreement touching money-matters between Mr. Chattaway and Mrs. Ryle, and the settlement of George Ryle in his own home, it may be said in his father's place, little occurred for some years worthy of note. Time seemed to pass on uneventfully. The girls and the boys grew into men and women; the children into girls and boys. Cris Chattaway lorded it in his own offensive manner as the Squire's son—as the future Squire; his sister Octavia was not more amiable than of yore, and Maude Trevlyn was governess to Mr. and Mrs. Chattaway's younger children. Miss Diana Trevlyn had taken care that Maude should be well educated, and she paid the expenses of it from her own pocket, in spite of Mr. Chattaway's sneers. When Maude was eighteen years of age, the question arose, What shall be done with her? "She shall go out and be a governess," said Mr. Chattaway. "Where will be the profit of all her fine education, if it's not to be made use of?" "No," dissented Miss Diana; "a Trevlyn cannot be sent out into the world to earn her own living: our family have not come to that." "I won't keep her in idleness," growled Chattaway. "Very well," said Miss Diana; "make her governess to your girls, Edith and Emily: it will save the cost of their schooling." And the advice was taken; and Maude for the past three years had been governess at Trevlyn Hold.

But Rupert? Rupert was found not to be so easily disposed of. There's no knowing what Chattaway, in his ill-feeling, might have put Rupert to, had he been at liberty to place him as he pleased. If he had not shown any superfluous consideration in placing out George Ryle—or rather in essaying to place him out—it was not likely he would show it to one whom he hated as he hated Rupert. But here Miss Diana stepped in, as she had done with regard to Maude. Rupert was a Trevlyn, she said, and consequently could not be converted into a

chimney-sweep or a shoe-black: he must get his living at something more befitting his degree. Chattaway demurred, but he knew better than to run counter to any mandate issued by Diana Trevlyn.

Several things were tried for Rupert. He was placed with a clergyman to study for the Church; he went to an LL.D. to read for the Bar; he was consigned to a wealthy grazier, to be made into a farmer; he was posted off to Sir John Rennet, to be initiated into the science of civil engineering. And he came back from all. As one after the other venture was made, so it failed, and a very short space of time would see Rupert returned as ineligible to Trevlyn Hold. Ineligible! Was he deficient in capacity? No. He was only deficient in that one great blessing, without which life can bring no enjoyment—health. In his weakness of chest—in his liability to take cold—in his suspiciously delicate frame, Rupert Trevlyn was ominously like his dead father. The clergyman, the doctor of laws, the hearty grazier, and the far-famed engineer, thought after a month's trial that they would rather not take charge of him. He had a fit of illness—it may be better to say of weakness—in the house of each; and they, no doubt, one and all, deemed that a pupil predisposed to disease—it may be almost said to death—as Rupert Trevlyn appeared to be, would bring with him too much responsibility.

So, times and again, Rupert was returned on the hands of Mr. Chattaway. To describe that gentleman's wrath would take a pen dipped in gall. Was Rupert *never* to be got rid of? It was as the slippers in the Eastern story, which persisted in turning up, their unhappy owner knew not how. And up came Rupert Trevlyn. The boy could not help his ill-health; but you may be sure Mr. Chattaway's favour to him was not increased by it. "I shall put him in the office at Blackstone," said he. And Miss Diana acquiesced.

Blackstone was the name of the locality where Mr. Chattaway's mines were situated. An appropriate name, for the place was black enough, and stony enough, and dreary enough for anything. A low, barren, level country, its flatness alone broken by the signs of the pits, its uncompromising gloom enlivened only by the ascending fires which blazed up near the pits at night, and illumined the country for miles round. The pits were not all coal: iron mines and other mines were scattered with them. On Chattaway's property, however, there was coal alone. Long rows of houses, as dreary as the barren country,

were built near: they were occupied by the workers in the mines. The overseer or manager for Mr. Chattaway was named Pinder, a brother to John Pinder, who was on Mrs. Ryle's farm; but Chattaway chose to interfere very much with the executive himself, and may almost have been called his own overseer. He had an office near to the pits, in which accounts were kept, the men paid, and other business items transacted; a low building, of one storey only, consisting of three or four rooms. In this office he kept one regular clerk, a young man named Ford, and into this same office he put Rupert Trevlyn.

But many and many and many a day was Rupert ailing; weak, sick, feverish, coughing, and unable to go to it. But for Diana Trevlyn, Chattaway might have driven him there ill or well. Not that Miss Diana possessed any extraordinary affection for Rupert: she did not keep him at home from love, or from motives of indulgence. But hard, cold, and imperious though she was, Miss Diana owned somewhat of the large open-handedness of the Trevlyns: she could not be guilty of trivial spite, or petty meanness. She ruled the servants with an iron hand; but in case of their falling into sickness or trouble, she had them generously cared for. So with respect to Rupert. It may be that she regarded him as an interloper; that she would have been better pleased were he removed elsewhere. She had helped to deprive him of his birthright, but she did not treat him with personal unkindness; and she would have been the last to say he must go out to his daily occupation, if he felt ill or incapable of it. She deplored his ill-health; but, ill health upon him, Miss Diana was not one to ignore it, to reproach him with it, or to put hindrances in the way of his being nursed.

It was a tolerably long walk for Rupert in a morning to Blackstone. Cris Chattaway, when he chose to go over, rode on horseback; and Mr. Cris did not infrequently choose to go over, for he had the same propensity as his father—that of throwing himself into every petty detail, and interfering unwarrantably. In disposition, father and son were alike—mean, stingy, grasping. To save a sixpence, Chattaway would almost have sacrificed a miner's life. Improvements which other mine owners had introduced into their pits, into the working of them, Chattaway held aloof from. In his own person, however, Cris was not disposed to be saving. He had his horse, and he had his servant, and he favoured an extensive wardrobe, and

was given altogether to various little odds and ends of self-indulgence.

Yes, Cris Chattaway rode to Blackstone; with his groom behind him sometimes, when he chose to make a dash; and Rupert Trevlyn walked. Better that the order of travelling had been reversed, for that walk, morning and evening, was not too good for Rupert in his weakly state. He would feel it particularly in an evening. It was a gradual ascent nearly all the way from Blackstone to Trevlyn Hold, almost imperceptible to a strong man, but sufficiently apparent to Rupert Trevlyn, who would be fatigued with the day's work.

Not that he had hard work to do. But even sitting on the office stool tired him. Another thing that tired him—and which, no doubt, was for him excessively pernicious—was the loss of his regular meals. Except on Sundays, or on those days when he was not well enough to leave Trevlyn Hold, he had no dinner: what he had at Blackstone was only an apology for one. The clerk, Ford, who lived at nearly as great a distance from the place as Rupert, used to cook himself a piece of steak at the office grate. But that the coals were lying about in heaps and cost nothing, Chattaway might have objected to the fire being used for any such purpose. Rupert occasionally cooked himself some steak; but he more frequently dined upon bread and cheese, or upon some old scraps brought from Trevlyn Hold. It was not often that Rupert had the money to buy steak or anything else, his supply of that indispensable commodity, the current coin of the realm, being very limited. Deprived of his dinner, deprived of his tea—tea being generally over when he got back to the Hold—that, of itself, was almost sufficient to bring on the disease feared for Rupert Trevlyn. One of sound constitution, revelling in health and strength, might not have been much the worse for the deprivation in the long-run; but Rupert did not come under the head of that favoured class of humanity.

It was a bright day in that mellow season when the summer is merging into autumn. A few fields of the later grain were lying out yet, but most of the golden store had been gathered into barns. The sunlight glistened on the leaves of the trees, lighting up their rich tints of brown and red—tints which never come until the season of passing away.

Halting at a stile which led from a lane into a field white with stubble, were two children and a young lady. Not very young children, either, for the younger of the two must have

been thirteen. Pale girls both, with light hair, and just now a disagreeable expression of countenance. They were insisting upon crossing that stile to go through the field: one of them, in fact, was already mounted on it, and they did not like the denial that was being dealt out to them.

"You cross old thing!" cried she on the stile, turning her head to make a face at the lady who was interposing her veto. "You always object to our going where we want to go. What dislike have you to the field, pray, that we may not cross it?"

"I have no dislike to it, Emily. I am only obeying your papa's injunctions. You know he has forbidden you to go on Mrs. Ryle's lands."

She spoke in calm tones; in a sweet, persuasive voice. She had a sweet and gentle face, too, with its delicate features, and its large blue eyes. It is Maude Trevlyn, grown into womanhood. Eight years have passed since you last saw her, and she is twenty-one. In spite of her girlish and graceful figure, which scarcely reaches to the middle height, she bears about her a look of the Trevlyns. Her head is well set upon her shoulders, thrown somewhat back, as you may see in Miss Diana Trevlyn. She wore a grey flowing cloak, and a pretty blue bonnet.

"The lands are not Mrs. Ryle's," retorted the young lady on the stile. "They are papa's."

"They are Mrs. Ryle's so long as she rents them. It is all the same. Mr. Chattaway has forbidden you to cross them. Come down from the stile, Emily."

"I shan't. I shall jump over it."

It was ever thus. Except when in the presence of Miss Diana Trevlyn, the girls were openly rude and disobedient to Maude. Expected, though she was, to teach them, she was yet denied the ordinary authority vested in a governess. And Maude could not emancipate herself: she must suffer and submit.

Emily Chattaway put her foot over the top bar of the stile, preparatory to carrying out her threat of jumping over it, when the sound of a horse was heard, and she turned her head. Riding along the lane at a quick pace was a gentleman of some three or four-and-twenty years: a tall man, as far as could be seen, who sat his horse well. He reined in when he saw them, and bent down a pleasant face, with a pleasant smile upon it. The sun shone into his fine dark eyes, as he stooped to shake hands with Maude.

Maude's cheeks had turned crimson. "Quite well," she stammered, in answer to his greeting, losing her self-possession in a remarkable degree. "When did you return home?"

"Last night. I was away two days only, instead of the four anticipated. Miss Emily, you'll fall backwards if you don't mind."

"No, I shan't," said Emily. "Why did you not stay longer?"

"I found Treve away when I reached Oxford, so I came back again, and got home last night—to Nora's discomfiture."

Maude looked into his face with a questioning glance. She had quite recovered her self-possession. "Why?" she asked.

George Ryle laughed. "Nora had turned my bedroom inside out, and I found nothing in it but wet boards. She accused me, in her vexation, of coming back on purpose."

"Did you sleep on the wet boards?" asked Emily.

"No, I slept in Treve's room. Take care, Edith!"

Maude hastily drew Edith Chattaway back. She had gone too near the horse. "How is Mrs. Ryle?" asked Maude. "We heard yesterday she was not well."

"She is suffering very much from a cold. I have scarcely seen her. Maude," he added, leaning down and speaking in a whisper, "are things any brighter than they were?"

Again the soft colour came into her face, and she threw him a glance from her dark blue eyes. If ever glance spoke of indignation, that did. "What change can there be?" she breathed. "Rupert is ill again," she added in louder tones.

"Rupert!"

"At least, he is poorly, and is at home to-day. But he is better than he was yesterday——"

"Here comes Octave," interrupted Emily.

George Ryle put his horse in motion. Shaking hands with Maude, he said a hasty good-bye to the other two, and cantered down the lane, lifting his hat to Miss Chattaway, who was coming up from the distance.

She was advancing quickly across the common, behind the fence on the other side of the lane. A tall, thin, bony young woman, looking her full age of four or five-and-twenty, with the same leaden-coloured complexion as of yore, and the disagreeably sly grey eyes. She wore a puce silk paletot, as they are called, made coat fashion, and a brown hat with black lace falling from its brim; an unbecoming costume for one so tall.

"That was George Ryle!" she exclaimed, as she came up. "What brings him back already?"

"He found his brother away when he reached Oxford," was Maude's reply.

"I think he was very rude, not to stop and speak to you, Octave," observed Emily Chattaway. "He saw you coming."

Octave made no reply. She mounted the stile by the side of Emily, and gazed after the horseman, apparently to see what direction he would take when he came to the end of the lane. Patiently watching, she saw him turn into another lane, which branched off to the left. Octave Chattaway jumped over the stile, and went swiftly across the field.

"She's gone to meet him," was Emily's comment.

It was precisely what Miss Chattaway *had* gone to do. Passing through a copse after quitting the field, she emerged from it, just as George was riding quietly past. He halted and stooped to shake hands with her, as he had done with Maude.

"You are out of breath, Octave. Have you been hastening to catch me?"

"I need not have done so but for your gallantry in riding off the moment you saw me," she answered, resentment in her tones.

"I beg your pardon. I did not know you wanted me. I was in a hurry."

"It seemed so—by your stopping to speak so long to the children and Maude," she returned, with irony. And George Ryle's laugh was a conscious one.

There was an ever latent antagonism seated in the minds of both. There was a latent consciousness of it running through their hearts. When George Ryle saw Octave hastening across the common, he knew as surely as though he had been told it, that she was speeding to reach him ere he should be gone; when Octave saw him ride away, a sure voice whispered her that he so rode to avoid meeting her; and each felt that their secret thoughts and motives were known to the other. Yes, there was constant antagonism between them; if the word may be applied to Octave Chattaway, who had learnt to value more highly than was good for her the society of George Ryle. Did he so value hers? Octave wore out her heart, hoping for it. But in the midst of her unwise love for him, in the midst of her never-ceasing efforts to be in his presence, near to him, there constantly arose the bitter conviction that he did not care for her.

"I wished to ask you about the book you promised to get me," she said. "Have you procured it?"

"No; and I am sorry to say that I cannot meet with it," replied George. "I thought of it at Oxford, and went into every bookseller's shop in the place, unsuccessfully. I told you it was difficult to be had. I must get them to write to London for it from Barmester."

"It is an insignificant book. It costs only three-and-sixpence."

"True. Its insignificance may explain its scarcity. Good afternoon, Octave."

"Will you come to the Hold this evening?" she asked, as he was riding away.

"Thank you. I am not sure that I can. My day or two's absence has made me busy."

Octave Chattaway drew back under cover of the trees, and there halted. She did not retreat until every trace of that fine young horseman she was gazing after had faded from her sight.

CHAPTER XII.

A NIGHT BELL UNANSWERED.

It is singular to observe how lightly the marks of Time sometimes pass over the human form and face. An instance of this might be seen in Mrs. Chattaway. It was strange that it should be so in her case. Her health was not good, and she certainly was not a happy woman. Illness was frequently her portion; care seemed ever to follow her; and it is upon these sufferers of mind and body that Time is fond of leaving his traces. He had not left them on Mrs. Chattaway; her face was fair and fresh as it had been eight years ago; her hair fell in its mass of curls; her eyes were still blue, and clear, and bright.

And yet anxiety was her constant companion. It may be said that remorse never left her. She would sit at the window of her room upstairs—Madam's room—for hours, apparently contemplating the outer world; in reality seeing nothing.

As she was sitting now. The glories of the bright day had faded into twilight; the sun no longer lit up the many hues of the autumn foliage; all the familiar points in the charming landscape had faded to indistinctness; old Canham's

chimneys at the lodge were becoming obscure, and the red light thrown up from the mines and works was beginning to show out on the right in the extreme distance. Mrs. Chattaway leaned her elbow on the old-fashioned armchair as she sat in it, and rested her cheek upon her hand. Had you looked at her eyes, gazing out so pertinaciously upon the fading landscape, you might have seen that they had no speculation in them. They were deep in the world of thought.

That constitutional timidity of hers had been nothing but a blight to her throughout her life. Reticence in a woman is good; but not that timorous reticence which is the result of fear; which dare not speak up for itself, even to oppose a wrong. Every wrong inflicted upon Rupert Trevlyn—every unkindness shown to him—every pang of sickness, whether of mind or body, which happier circumstances might have spared to him, was avenged over and over again in the person of Mrs. Chattaway. It may be said that she lived only in pain; her life was one never-ending sorrow—sorrow for Rupert.

In the old days, when her husband had chosen to deceive Squire Trevlyn as to the existence of Rupert, she had not dared to avow the truth, and say to her father, "There is an heir born." She dared not fly in the face of her husband, and say it; and, it may be, that she was too willingly silent for her husband's sake. It would seem strange, but that we know what fantastic tricks our passions play us, that pretty, gentle Edith Trevlyn should have *loved* that essentially disagreeable man, James Chattaway. But so it was. And, while deploring the fact of the wrong dealt out to Rupert—it may almost be said *expiating* it—Mrs. Chattaway never visited that wrong upon her husband, even in thought, as it ought to have been visited. None could realize more intensely its consequences than she realized them in her secret heart. Expiate it? Ay, she expiated it again and again, if her sufferings could only have been reckoned as atonement.

But they could not. *They* were enjoying Trevlyn Hold and its benefits, and Rupert was little better than an outcast on the face of the earth. Every dinner that was put upon their table, every article of attire bought for their children, every mark of honour or substantial comfort which their position brought to them, seemed to rise up reproachfully before the face of Mrs. Chattaway, and say, "The money to procure all this is not yours and your husband's; it is wrenched from Rupert." And

she could do nothing to remedy it; she could only wage ever-continued battle with the knowledge, and with the sting it brought. No remedy existed. They had not come into the inheritance by legal fraud or wrong: they succeeded to it fairly and openly, according to the legally-made will of Squire Trevlyn. If the whole world ranged itself on Rupert's side, pressing that the property should be resigned to him, Mr. Chattaway had only to point with his finger to the will, and say, "You cannot act against that."

It may be that this very fact brought remorse with greater force home to Mrs. Chattaway. It may be that her incessantly dwelling upon it caused a morbid state of feeling, which of itself served to increase the malady. Certain it is, that by night and by day the wrongs of Rupert were ever pressing painfully on her mind. She loved him with that strange intensity which brings an aching to the heart. When the baby orphan was brought home to her from its foreign birthplace, with its rosy cheeks and its golden curls—when it put out its little arms to her, and gazed at her with its loving blue eyes, her heart went out to it there and then, and she caught it to her with a love more passionate than any ever given to her own children. The irredeemable wrong inflicted on the unconscious child, fixed itself on her conscience in that hour, never to be lifted from it.

If ever a woman lived a dual life, that woman was Mrs. Chattaway. Her true aspect—that in which she saw herself as she really was—was as different from the one presented to the world as is light from darkness. Do not blame her. It was difficult to help it. The world and her own family saw in Mrs. Chattaway a weak, gentle, apathetic woman, who could not, or might not—at any rate, who did not—take upon herself even the ordinary authority of the head of a household. They little thought that that weak woman, remarkable for nothing but indifference, passed her days in distress, in care, in thought. The inherent timidity (it had existed in her mother) which had been her bane in former days, was her bane still. She had not dared to rise up against her husband when the injustice was inflicted upon Rupert Trevlyn; she did not dare openly to rise up now against the petty wrongs daily dealt out to him. There may have been a latent consciousness in her mind that if she did so rise up it would not alter things for the better, and it might make them worse for Rupert. Probably it would have been found so; and that the non-interference was for the best.

There were many things she could have wished done for Rupert, and she went so far as to hint at some of them to Mr. Chattaway. She wished he could be relieved altogether from going to Blackstone; she wished greater indulgences for him at home; she wished he might be transported to a warmer climate. A bare suggestion of one or other of these things she dropped, once in a way, to Mr. Chattaway. They fell unheeded on his ear, as must be supposed by their not being answered. He replied to one of them—the hint of the warmer climate—with a prolonged stare and a demand as to what romantic absurdity she could be thinking of. Mrs. Chattaway had never mentioned it again. In these cases of constitutional timidity, a rebuff, let it be ever so slight, is sufficient to close the lips for ever. Poor lady! she would have sacrificed her own comfort to give peace and comfort to the unhappy Rupert. He was miserably put upon, he was treated with less consideration than were the servants, he was made to feel his dependent state daily and hourly by petty annoyances; and yet she could not interfere openly to help him!

Even now, as she sat watching the deepening shades of night, she was dwelling on this; resenting it in her heart, for his sake. It was the evening of the day when the young ladies had met George Ryle in the lane. She could hear the sounds of merriment downstairs from her children and their visitors, and she felt sure that Rupert did not make one amongst them. It had long been the pleasure of Cris and Octave to exclude Rupert from the general society, the evening gatherings of the family, as far as they could do so; and if, through the presence of herself or of Miss Diana, they could not absolutely deny his entrance, they took care to treat him with cavalier indifference. She sat on, revolving these bitter thoughts in the gloom, until roused by the entrance of an intruder.

It was Rupert himself. He approached Mrs. Chattaway, and she fondly threw her arm round him, and drew him down to a chair by her side. Only when they were alone could she show him these marks of affection, or prove to him that he did not stand in the world entirely isolated from all ties of love.

"Do you feel better to-night, Rupert?"

"Oh, I am a great deal better. I feel quite well. Why are you sitting alone in the dark, Aunt Edith?"

"It is not quite dark yet. What are they doing below, Rupert? I hear plenty of laughter."

"They are playing at some game, I think."

"At what?"

"I don't know. I was taking a place with them, when Octave, as usual, said they were enough without me; so I came away."

Mrs. Chattaway made no reply. She never spoke a reproachful word of her children to Rupert, whatever she might feel; she never, by so much as a breathing, cast a reproach on her husband to living mortal. Rupert leaned his head on her shoulder, as if he were weary. Sufficient light was left to show how delicate were his features, how attractive was his face. The lovely countenance of his boyhood characterized him still—the suspiciously bright cheeks and the silken hair. Of middle height, his frame slender and fragile, he scarcely looked his twenty years. There was a resemblance in his face to Mrs. Chattaway's: and it was not surprising, for Joe Trevlyn and his sister Edith had been remarkably alike when they were young.

"Is Cris come in?" asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"Not yet."

Rupert rose as he spoke, and stretched himself. The verb *s'ennuyer* was one he often felt himself obliged to conjugate, in his evenings at Trevlyn Hold.

"I think I shall go down for an hour to Trevlyn Farm."

Mrs. Chattaway started. She, as it seemed, shrank from the words. "Not to-night, Rupert!"

"It is so dull at home, Aunt Edith."

"They are merry enough downstairs."

"*They* are. But Octave takes care that I shall not be merry with them."

What could she answer?

"Well, then, Rupert, you will *be sure* to be home," she said, after a while. And the pained emphasis with which she spoke the words "be sure," no pen could express. Some meaning, understood by Rupert, was evidently conveyed by them.

"Yes," was all he answered; the tones of his voice telling of undisguised resentment.

Mrs. Chattaway caught him to her, and hid her face upon his shoulder. "For my sake, Rupert, darling! for my sake!"

"Yes, yes, dear Aunt Edith: I'll be sure to be in time," he reiterated. "I'll not forget the hour, as I did the other night."

She stood at the window, and watched him away from the house and down the avenue, praying that he might *not* forget the hour. It had pleased Mr. Chattaway lately to forbid Rupert's entrance to the house, unless he returned to it by half-past ten. That this motive was entirely that of ill-naturedly crossing Rupert, there could be little doubt. Driven by unkindness from the Hold, Rupert had taken to spending his evenings with George Ryle; sometimes at the houses of other friends; now and then he would invade old Canham's. Rupert's hour for coming in from these visits was about eleven; he generally had managed to be in by the time the clock struck; but the master of Trevlyn Hold suddenly issued a mandate that he must be in by half-past ten; failing strict obedience as to time, he was not to be let in at all. Rupert resented it, and one or two unpleasant scenes had ensued. A similar rule was not applied to Cris, who might come in any hour he pleased.

Mrs. Chattaway descended to the drawing-room. Two young ladies, the daughters of neighbours, were spending the evening there, and they were playing at proverbs with intense relish: Maude Trevlyn, the guests, and the Miss Chattaways. Octave alone joined in it listlessly, as if her thoughts were far away. Her restless glances towards the door seemed to say that she was watching for the entrance of one who did not come.

By-and-by Mr. Chattaway came home, and they sat down to supper. Afterwards, the young ladies departed, and the younger children went to bed. Ten o'clock struck, and the time went on again.

"Where's Rupert?" Mr. Chattaway suddenly asked of his wife.

"He went down to Trevlyn Farm, James," she said, unable, had it been to save her life, to speak without deprecation.

He gave no answer by word or look to his wife; but he rang the bell, and ordered the household to bed. Miss Diana Trevlyn was out upon a visit.

"Cris and Rupert are not in, papa," observed Octave, as she lighted her mamma's candle and her own.

Mr. Chattaway took out his watch. "Twenty-five minutes past ten," he said, in his hard, impassive manner—a manner which imparted the idea that he was utterly destitute of sympathy for the whole human race. "Mr. Rupert must be quick

if he intends to come inside to-night. Give your mamma her bed-candle."

It may appear almost incredible that Mrs. Chattaway should meekly take her candle and follow her daughter upstairs without remonstrance, when she would have given the world to sit up longer. She was becoming quite feverish on Rupert's account, and she would have wished to wait in that room until his ring was heard. But to set up her own will against her husband's was a thing she had never yet done; in small things as in great, she had bowed to his mandates without making the faintest shadow of resistance.

Octave wished her mamma good night, went into her room, and closed the door. Mrs. Chattaway was turning into hers when she saw Maude creeping down the upper stairs. She came noiselessly along the corridor, her face pale with agitation, and her heart beating.

"Oh, Aunt Edith, what will be done?" she murmured. "It is half-past ten, and he is not home."

"Maude, my poor child, you can do nothing," was the whispered answer, the tone as full of pain as Maude's. "Go back to your room, dear; your uncle may be coming up."

The great clock in the hall struck the half-hour, its sound falling as a knell. Hot tears were dropping from the eyes of Maude.

"What will become of him, Aunt Edith? Where will he sleep?"

"Hush, Maude! Run back."

It was time to run; and Mrs. Chattaway spoke the words in startled tones. The heavy foot of the master of Trevlyn Hold was heard crossing the hall to ascend the stairs. Maude stole back, and Mrs. Chattaway passed into her dressing-room.

She sat down on a chair, and pressed her hands upon her bosom to still its beating. Her suspense and agitation were terrible. A sensitive nature, such as Mrs. Chattaway's, feels emotion in a most painful degree. Every sense was strung to its utmost tension. She listened for Rupert's footfall outside; she waited with a sort of horror for the ringing of the house-bell that should announce his arrival, her whole frame sick and faint.

At last, one came running up the avenue at a fleet pace, and the echoes of the bell were heard resounding through the house.

Not daring to defy her husband by going down to let him

in, she passed into the bedroom, where Mr. Chattaway was undressing.

"Shall I go down and open the door, James?"

"No."

"It is only five minutes over the half-hour.'

"Five minutes are the same in effect as five hours," answered Mr. Chattaway, taking off his waistcoat. "Unless he can be in before the half-hour, *he does not come in at all.*"

"It may be Cris," she resumed.

"Nonsense! You know it is not Cris. Cris has his latch-key."

Another alarming peal.

"He can see the light in my dressing-room," she urged, with parched lips. "Oh, James, let me go down."

"I tell you—No."

There was no appeal against it. She knew there might be none. But she clasped her hands in agony, and gave utterance to the distress at her heart.

"Where will he sleep? Where can he go, if we deny him entrance?"

"Where he chooses. He does not come in here."

And Mrs. Chattaway went back to her dressing-room, and listened in despair to the continued appeals from the bell. Appeals which she might not answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

OPINIONS DIFFER.

THE nights were chilly in the early autumn, and a blazing fire burnt in the drawing-room grate at Trevlyn Farm. On a comfortable sofa, drawn close to it, sat Mrs. Ryle, a warm shawl thrown over her black silk gown—warm eider-down cushions heaped around her. A violent cold had made an invalid of her for some days past, but she was getting better. Her face was softened by a white cap of delicate lace; but its lines had grown haughtier and firmer with her years. She wore well, and was handsome still.

Trevlyn Farm had prospered. It was a lucky day for Mrs. Ryle when she decided upon her step-son's remaining on it. He had brought energy and goodwill to bear on his work; he

had brought a clear head and calm intelligence; and time had contributed judgment and experience. Mrs. Ryle knew that she could not have been better served than she had been by George, and she gradually grew to feel his value. Had they been really mother and son, they could not have been better friends. In the beginning she was inclined to discountenance sundry ways and habits which George favoured. He did not turn himself into a *working* farmer, as his father had done, and as Mrs. Ryle deemed he ought to do. George objected. A man who worked on his own farm must necessarily give to it less of general supervision, he urged: were his hands engaged on one place, his eyes could not be using themselves to advantage a mile or two off; and after all, it was only the cost of an additional day-labourer. His argument carried reason with it; and that keen and active man, Farmer Apperley, who deemed idleness the greatest sin (next, perhaps, to going out hunting) that a young farmer could be guilty of, nodded his approval. George did not put aside his books; his classics, and his studies in general literature; quite the contrary. In short, George Ryle appeared to be going in for a gentleman—as Cris Chattaway chose to term it—a great deal more than Mrs. Ryle considered would be profitable for him or for her. But George had held on his course, in a quiet, undemonstrative way; and Mrs. Ryle had at length fallen in with it. Perhaps she now saw its wisdom. That he was essentially a gentleman, in person as in manners, in mind as in conduct, she could but acknowledge, and she felt a pride in him which she had never thought to feel in any one, save Treve.

Could she feel pride in Treve? Not much, with all her partiality. Trevlyn Ryle was not turning out quite so satisfactorily as was desirable. There was nothing very objectionable to be urged against him; but Mrs. Ryle was accustomed to measure by a high standard of excellence; and of that Treve fell uncommonly short. She had not deemed it well that George Ryle should be too much of a gentleman, but she had determined to make Trevlyn into one. Upon the completion of his school life, he was sent to Oxford. The cost of this might have been imprudently heavy for Mrs. Ryle's pocket, had she borne it unassisted; but Trevlyn had gained a valuable scholarship at the Barmester Grammar School where he had been educated, and this had rendered the additional cost a light one. Treve, once at Oxford, did not get on quite so fast as he might have done. Treve spent; Treve seemed to have

plenty of wild-oats to sow; Treve thought he should like a life of idleness better than one of farming. His mother had foolishly whispered to him the fond hope that he might some time be Squire of Trevlyn Hold, and Treve reckoned upon its fulfilment more confidently than was good for him. Meanwhile, until the lucky chance arrived which should give him the inheritance (though by what miracle the chance should fall was at present hidden in the womb of mystery), Treve, upon the completion of his studies at college, was to assume the mastership of Trevlyn Farm, in accordance with the plan originally fixed upon by Mrs. Ryle. He would not be altogether unqualified for this: he had been out and about the farm since he was a child, and had seen how it should be worked. Whether he would give sufficient personal attention to it, was another matter.

Mrs. Ryle expressed herself as not being too confident of him—whether of his industry or his qualifications she did not state. George had given one or two hints that when Treve came home for good, he must look out for something else; but Mrs. Ryle had waived away the hints as if they were unpleasant to her. Treve must prove yet what metal he was made of, before assuming the full management, she briefly said. And George suffered the subject to drop.

Treve had now but one more term to keep at the university. At the conclusion of the previous term he had not returned home: he remained on a visit to a friend, who had an appointment in one of the colleges. But Treve's demand for money had become somewhat inconvenient to Mrs. Ryle, and she had begged George to pay Oxford a few days' visit, that he might see how Treve was really going on. George complied, and proceeded to Oxford, where he found Treve absent—as you heard him, in the last chapter, say to Maude Trevlyn.

Mrs. Trevlyn sat by the drawing-room fire, enveloped in her shawl, and leaning on her pillows. The thought of these things was bringing a severe look to her proud face. She had scarcely seen George since his return; had not exchanged more than ten words with him. But those ten words had not been of a cheering nature; and she feared things were not going on satisfactorily with Treve. With that severely hard look on her features, how wonderfully her face resembled that of her dead father!

Presently George came in. Mrs. Ryle looked eagerly up at his entrance.

"Are you better?" he asked, advancing to her, and bending down with a kindly smile. "It is long since you had a cold such as this."

"I shall be all right in a day or two," she answered. "Yesterday I thought I was going to have a long illness, my chest was so sore and painful. Sit down, George. What about Treve?"

"Treve was not at Oxford. He had gone to London."

"You told me so. What had he gone to London for?"

"A little change, Ferrars said. He had been gone a week."

"A little change? In plain English, a little pleasure, I suppose. Call it what you will, it costs money, George."

George had seated himself opposite to her, his arm resting on the centre table, and the red blaze lighting up his frank and pleasant face. In figure he was tall, slight, gentlemanly; his father, at his age, had been so before him.

"Why did you not follow him to London, George?" resumed Mrs. Ryle. "It would have been but a two hours' journey from Oxford. Not so much as that."

George turned his large dark eyes upon her, some surprise in them. "How was I to know where to look for him, if I had gone?"

"Could Mr. Ferrars not give you his address?"

"No. I asked him. Treve had not told him where he should put up. In fact, Ferrars did not think Treve knew where himself. Under those circumstances, my going to town might have been only a waste of time and money."

"I *wish* you could have seen Treve!"

"So do I. But I might look for him a whole week without finding him, in a place like London. And the harvest was not all in at home, you know, mother."

"It is of no use your keeping things from me, George," resumed Mrs. Ryle, after a pause. "Has Treve contracted fresh debts at Oxford?"

"I fancy he has. A few."

"A 'few!'—and you 'fancy!' George, tell me the truth. That you know he has, and that they are not a few."

"That he has, I believe to be true: I gathered so much from Ferrars. But I do not think they are many; I do not indeed."

"Why did you not inquire? I would have gone to every shop in the town, in order to ascertain. If he is contracting more debts, who is to pay them, George?"

George was silent.

"When shall we be clear of Chattaway?" she abruptly resumed. "When will the last payment be due?"

"In a month or two's time. Principal and interest will all be paid off then."

"It will take all your exertions to get the sum up."

"It will be got up, mother. It shall be."

"Yes; I don't doubt it. But it will not be got up, George, if a portion is to be taken from it for Treve."

George knitted his brow. He was falling into thought.

"I *must* get rid of Chattaway," she resumed. "He has been weighing us down all these years like an incubus; and now that emancipation has nearly come, were anything to frustrate it, I should—I should—George, I think I should go mad."

"I hope and trust nothing will frustrate it," answered George. "I am more anxious to get rid of Chattaway than, I think, even you can be. As to Treve, his debts must wait."

"But it would be more desirable that he should not contract them," observed Mrs. Ryle.

"Of course. But how are we to prevent his contracting them?"

"He ought to prevent it himself. *You* did not contract these miserable debts, George."

"I!" he rejoined, in surprise. "I had no opportunity of doing so. Work and responsibility were thrown upon me before I was old enough to think of pleasure: and they served to keep me steady."

"You were not naturally inclined to spend, George."

"There's no knowing what I might have acquired, had I been sent out into the world, as Treve has," he rejoined.

"It was necessary that Treve should go to the university," said Mrs. Ryle, quite sharply.

"I am not saying that it was not," George answered, quietly. "It was right that he should go, as you wished it."

"George, I shall live—I hope I shall live—I pray that I may live—to see Trevlyn the lawful possessor of Trevlyn Hold. A gentleman's education was therefore essential to him: hence I sent him to Oxford."

George made no reply. Mrs. Ryle felt vexed at it. She knew that George did not approve her policy in regard to Trevlyn. She charged him with it now, and George would not deny it.

"What I think unwise," he said, "is your having led Treve to build hopes upon succeeding to Trevlyn Hold."

"Why?" she haughtily asked. "He will come into it."

"I do not see how," quietly remarked George.

"He has far more right to it than he who is looked upon as its successor—Cris Chattaway," she said, with flashing eyes. "You know that."

George could have answered that neither of them had a right to it, in justice, whilst Rupert Trevlyn lived; but Rupert and his claims had been so completely ignored by Mrs. Ryle, as by others, that his urging them would have been waived away as idle talk. Mrs. Ryle resumed, her voice unsteady in its tones. It was most rare that she suffered herself to speak of these past grievances; but when she did, her vehemence amounted to agitation.

"When my boy was born, the news that Joe Trevlyn's health was failing had come home to us. I knew the Squire would never leave the property to Maude, a girl, and I expected then that my son would inherit. Was it not natural that I should do so?—was it not his right?—I was the Squire's eldest daughter. I had him named Trevlyn; I wrote a note to my father, saying that he would not now be at fault for a male heir, in the event of poor Joe's not leaving one——"

"He did leave one," interrupted George, probably speaking impulsively.

"Be still. Rupert was not born then, and his succession was afterwards barred by my father's will. Through deceit practised on him, I grant you: but I had no hand in that deceit. I named my boy Trevlyn; I regarded him as the heir; and when the Squire died and his will was opened, it was found that he had bequeathed all to Chattaway. If you think I have ever once faltered in my hope—my *resolve*—to see Trevlyn some time displace the Chattaways, George, you do not know much of human nature."

"I grant what you say," replied George, "that, of the two, Trevlyn has more just right to it than Cris Chattaway. But has it ever occurred to you to ask, *how* Cris is to be displaced?"

Mrs. Ryle did not answer. She sat beating her foot upon the ottoman, as one whose mind is not at ease. George continued—

"It appears to me to be the wildest possible fallacy, the bare idea of Trevlyn's being able to displace Cris Chattaway in the succession. If we lived in the barbarous ages, when inheritances were wrested from their possessors by force of arms, when the turn of a battle decided the ownership of a castle, then

there might be a chance of Trevlyn Hold being taken from Cris Chattaway. As it is, there is none. There is not the faintest shadow of a chance that it can go to any one beside Cris. Failing his death—and he is strong and healthy—he *must* succeed. Why, even were Rupert—forgive my alluding to him again—to urge *his* claims, there would be no hope for him. Mr. Chattaway holds the estate by right of law; he has willed it to his son; and that son cannot be displaced in the succession by any extraneous efforts of others."

Her foot beat the velvet more impatiently; a heavier line settled on her brow. Often and often had the very arguments now put into words by her step-son, brought their weight to her aching brain. George spoke again.

"And therefore, the very improbability—I may almost say the impossibility—of Treve's ever succeeding to Trevlyn Hold, renders it unwise that he should have been taught to build upon it. Far better, mother, that the contingency had never been so much as whispered to him."

"Why do you look at it in this unfavourable light?" she burst forth.

"Because it is the correct light," answered George. "The property is Mr. Chattaway's—legally his, and it cannot be taken from him. It will be Cris's after him."

"Cris may die," said Mrs. Ryle; her sharpness of tone proving that she was vexed at having no better argument to urge.

"And if he were to die? If Cris died to-morrow, Treve would be no nearer succession. Chattaway has daughters, and he would will it to each of them in turn, rather than to Treve. He can will it away as he pleases. It was left to him absolutely."

Mrs. Ryle lifted her hands "My father was mad when he made such a will in favour of Chattaway! He could have been nothing less. I have thought so many times."

"But it was made, and it cannot now be altered. Will you pardon me for saying that it would have been better had you accepted the state of affairs, and endeavoured to reconcile yourself to them?"

"It would have been *better?*"

"Yes. To rebel against what cannot be remedied brings nothing but dissatisfaction. I would a great deal rather see Treve succeed to Trevlyn Hold than Cris Chattaway: but I know that Treve never will succeed: and, therefore, it is a

great pity that he has been led to think of it. He might have shown himself more ready to settle down steadily had he never become possessed of the notion that he might some time supersede Cris Chattaway."

"He *shall* supersede him——"

The door opened to admit a visitor, and Mrs. Ryle could not conclude her sentence. For he who entered was Rupert Trevlyn. Ignore his dormant claims as she would, Mrs. Ryle felt that it would be scarcely seemly to discuss before him Treve's chance of succession to Trevlyn Hold. She had in truth completely put out of her mind all thought of the claims of Rupert. He had been deprived of his right by Squire Trevlyn's will, and there was an end to it. Mrs. Ryle rather liked Rupert; or, it may be better to say, she did not *dis*like him; really to like any one except Treve, was not in her nature. She liked Rupert in a cold, negative sort of a way; but she would not have helped him to his inheritance by lifting a finger. In the event of her possessing no son to be jealous for, she might have taken up the wrongs of Rupert. There is no saying—just to thwart Chattaway.

"Why, Rupert," said George, rising, and cordially taking his hand, "I heard you were ill again. Maude told me so to-day."

"I am better to-night, George. Aunt Ryle, they said you were in bed."

"I am better, too, Rupert," she answered. "What has been the matter with you?"

"Oh, it was my chest again," said Rupert, pushing the waving hair from his bright and delicate face. "I could hardly breathe this morning."

"Ought you to have come out to-night?"

"I don't think it matters," carelessly answered Rupert. "For all I see, I am as well when I go out as when I don't. There's not much to stay in for, there."

He edged himself closer to the hearth with a slight shiver. He was painfully susceptible to cold. George took the poker and stirred the fire, and the blaze went flashing up, playing on the familiar objects of the handsome room, lighting up the slender figure, the well-formed features, the large blue eyes of Rupert, and bringing out all the suspicious signs of constitutional delicacy. The transparent fairness of complexion and the rich bloom of the cheeks, might alike have whispered a warning.

"Octave thought you were going up there to-night, George."

"Did she?"

"The two Beecroft girls are there, and they turned me out of the drawing-room. Octave told me 'I wasn't wanted.' Will you play at chess to-night, George?"

"If you like; when I have had my supper."

"I must be home by half-past ten, you know. I was a minute over the half-hour the other night, and one of the servants opened the door for me. Chattaway pretty nearly rose the roof off, he was so angry; but he could not decently turn me out again."

"Chattaway is master for the time being of Trevlyn Hold," remarked Mrs. Ryle. "Not Squire; never Squire"—she broke off, straying abruptly from her subject, and as abruptly resuming it. "You will do well to obey him, Rupert. When I make a rule in this house, I *never permit it to be broken.*"

A valuable hint, if Rupert had only taken it for his guidance. He meant well: he never meant, for all his light and careless speaking, to be disobedient to Mr. Chattaway's mandate as to the time of returning. And yet the disobedience happened that very night!

The chess-board was attractive, and the time slipped on to half-past ten. Rupert said a hasty good night, snatched up his hat, tore through the entrance-room at a pace to frighten Nora, and made the best speed his lungs allowed him to Trevlyn Hold. His heart was beating, his breath panting as he gained it, and he rang that peal at the bell which had sent its echoes through the house; through the trembling frame, the weak heart of Mrs. Chattaway.

He rang—and rang. There came back no sign that the ring was heard. A light shone in Mrs. Chattaway's dressing-room; and Rupert took up some gravel, and gently threw it against the window. No response was accorded in answer to it; he saw not so much as the form of a hand on the blind: the house, in its utter stillness, might have been taken for the house of the dead. Rupert threw up some more gravel as silently as he could.

He had not to wait very long this time. Cautiously, slowly, as though the very movement feared being heard, the blind was drawn aside, and the face of Mrs. Chattaway, wet with tears, appeared, looking down at him. He could see that she had not begun to undress. She shook her head; she raised her hands and clasped them with a gesture of despair; and

her lips formed themselves into the words, "I may not let you in."

He could not hear the words; but he read the expression of the whole all too clearly—that Chattaway would not suffer him to be admitted. Mrs. Chattaway, dreading possibly that her husband might cast his eyes inside her dressing-room, quietly let the blind fall again, and removed her shadow from the window.

Now what was Rupert to do? Lie down on the grass that skirted the avenue, and take his night's rest under the trees, the cold air freezing him, and the night dews wetting him? A strong frame, revelling in superfluous health, might risk that; but not Rupert Trevlyn.

He walked round the house, and tried its back entrance. It was quite fast. He knocked, but no answer came. He looked up at the windows; lights shone in one or two of the upper rooms; but there came no sign that any one meant to let him in.

A momentary thought came over him that he would go back to Trevlyn Farm, and crave a night's shelter there. He would have done so, but for the recollection of Mrs. Ryle's stern voice and sterner face when she remarked to him that, as he knew the rule made for his going in, he must not break it. Rupert had never got on too cordially with Mrs. Ryle. He remembered shrinking from her haughty face when he was a child; and somehow he shrank from it still. No; he would not knock them up at Trevlyn Farm.

What must he do? Should he walk about until morning? Suddenly a thought came to him—were the Canhams in bed? If not, he could go there, and lie on their settle. The Canhams never went to bed very early. Ann Canham sat up to lock the great gate—it was Chattaway's pleasure that it should not be done until after ten o'clock; and old Canham liked to sit up, smoking his pipe.

With a brisk step, now that he had decided on his course, Rupert walked down the avenue. At the first turning he ran against Cris Chattaway, who was coming leisurely up it.

"Oh, Cris! I am so glad! You'll let me in. They have shut me out to-night."

"Let you in!" repeated Cris. "I can't."

Rupert's blue eyes opened in the starlight. "Have you not your latch-key?"

"What should hinder me?" responded Cris. "*I'm* going in; but I can't let you go in."

"Why not?" hotly asked Rupert.

"I don't choose to fly in the face of the Squire's orders. He has commanded you to be in before half-past ten, or not to come in at all. It has gone half-past ten long ago: is hard upon eleven."

"If you can go in after half-past ten, why can't I go in?" cried Rupert.

"It's not my affair," said Cris, with a yawn. "Don't bother. Now look here, Rupert! It's of no use following me to the door, for I shall not let you in."

"Yes you will, Cris."

"*I will not*," responded Cris, speaking emphatically, but with the same plausible suavity that he had spoken throughout. Rupert's temper was getting up.

"Cris, I wouldn't show myself such a hang-dog sneak as you to be made king of England. If every one had their rights, Trevlyn Hold would be mine, to shut you out of it if I pleased. But I wouldn't please. If but a dog were turned out of his kennel at night, I would let him come into the Hold for shelter."

Cris put his latch-key in the lock. "*I* don't turn you out. You must battle that question with the Squire. Keep off, Ru. If he says you may be let in at eleven o'clock, all well and good; but I'm not going to encourage you in disobeying his orders."

He opened the door a few inches, wound himself in, and shut it in Rupert's face. He made a great noise in putting up the bar, which noise was not in the least necessary. Rupert had given him his true appellation—that of sneak. He was one: a false-hearted, plausible, cowardly sneak. As he stood at a table in the hall, and struck a match to light his candle, his puny face and his dull light eyes betrayed the most complaisant enjoyment.

He went upstairs smiling. He had to pass the angle of the corridor where his mother's rooms were situated. She glided silently out as he was going by. Her dress was off, and she had apparently thrown a shawl over her shoulders to come out to Cris. It was an old-fashioned spun-silk shawl, with a grey border and a white centre: not so white, however, as the face of Mrs. Chattaway.

"Cris!" she said, laying her hand upon his arm, and speaking

in the faintest, most timid of whispers, "why did you not let him in?"

"I thought we had been ordered not to let him in," returned he of the deceitful nature. "*I* have been ordered. I know that."

"You might have done it just for once, Cris," his mother answered. "I know not what will become of him, out of doors on this sharp night."

Cris disengaged his arm, and continued his way up to his room. He slept on the upper floor. Maude was standing at the door of her chamber when he passed—as Mrs. Chattaway had been.

"Cris—wait a minute," she said, for he was hastening by. "I want to speak a word to you. Have you seen Rupert?"

"Seen him and heard him too," boldly avowed Cris. "He wanted me to let him in."

"Which, of course, you would not do?" answered Maude, bitterly. "I wonder if you ever performed a good-natured action in your life?"

"Can't remember," mockingly retorted Cris.

"Where is Rupert? What is he going to do?"

"You know where he is as well as I do: I suppose you could hear him. As to what he is going to do, I didn't ask him. Roost in a tree, perhaps, with the birds."

Maude retreated into her room and closed the door. She flung herself into a chair, and burst into a flood of passionate tears. Her heart ached for her brother with pain that amounted to agony: she could have forced down her proud spirit and knelt to Mr. Chattaway to beg clemency for him: she could almost have sacrificed her own life if it might bring comfort to Rupert, whom she loved so well.

He—Rupert—stamped off from the door when it was closed against him by Cris Chattaway, feeling as if he would like to stamp upon Cris himself. Arrived in front of the lodge, he stood and whistled, and presently Ann Canham, who was undressing in the dark to save candle, looked from the upper casement in her nightcap.

"Why, it's never you, Master Rupert!" she exclaimed, in intense surprise.

"They have locked me out, Ann. Can you manage to come down and open the door to me without disturbing your father? If you can, I'll lie on the settle for to-night."

Once inside, there ensued a contest. In her humble way,

begging pardon for the presumption, Ann Canham proposed that Master Rupert should go up to her bed, and she'd make herself contented with the settle. It was only a flock, and very small, she said; but it would be rather better than the settle. Rupert would not hear of it. He threw himself on the hard narrow bench that they called the settle, and protested that if Ann Canham said another word about giving up her bed, he would go out and spend the night in the avenue. So she was fain to go back to it herself.

A dreary night for him, that wearying bench; and the morning found him with a cold frame and stiffened limbs. He was stamping one foot on the floor to stamp the cramp out of it, when old Canham entered, leaning on a crutch. Ann had told him the news, and the old man was up before his time.

"But who shut you out, Master Rupert?" he asked.

"Chattaway."

"Ann says that Mr. Cris went in pretty late last night. After she had locked the big gate."

"Cris came up whilst I was ringing to be let in. He went in himself, but would not let me enter."

"He's a reptile," said old Canham in his anger. "Eh me!" he added, sitting down with difficulty in his armchair, and extending the crutch before him, "what a mercy it would have been if Mr. Joe had lived! Chattaway would never have been stuck up in authority then. Better that the Squire had left Trevlyn Hold to Miss Diana."

"They say he would not leave it to a woman."

"That's true, Master Rupert. And of his children there were but his daughters left. The two sons had gone. The heir Rupert first: he died on the high seas; and Mr. Joe, he went next."

"I say, Mark, why did the heir, Rupert, go on the seas?"

Old Canham shook his head. "Ah, it was a bad business, Master Rupert. It's as well not to talk of it."

"But *why* did he go?" persisted Rupert.

"It was a bad business, I say. He, the heir, had fallen into wild ways, had got to like bad company, and that. He went out one night with some poachers—just for the fun of it. It wasn't on these lands. He meant no harm, but he was young and random, and he went out and put a gauze over his face as they did,—just, I say, for the fun of it. Master Rupert, that night they killed a gamekeeper."

A shiver passed through Rupert's frame. "*He* killed him, do you mean?—my uncle, Rupert Trevlyn?"

"No, it wasn't he that killed him—as was proved a long while afterwards. But you see at the time it wasn't known exactly who had done it: they were all in league together, as may be said; all in the mess. Any way, the young heir, whether in fear or shame, perhaps both, went off in secret, and before many months had gone over, the bells here were tolling for him. He had died far away."

"But people never could have believed that he, a Trevlyn, killed a man?" said Rupert, indignantly.

Old Canham paused. "You have heard of the Trevlyn temper, Master Rupert?"

"Who hasn't?" returned Rupert. "They say I have a touch of it."

"Well, those that believed it laid it to that temper, you see. They thought the heir had been overtook by a fit of passion that wasn't to be governed, and might have done the mischief in it. In those fits of passion a man is mad."

"Is he," abstractedly remarked Rupert, falling into a reverie. He had never before heard this episode in the history of the uncle whose name he bore—Rupert Trevlyn.

CHAPTER XIV.

NO BREAKFAST FOR RUPERT.

Old Canham stood at the door of his lodge, his bald head stretched out. He was gazing after one who was winding through the avenue, in the direction of Trevlyn Hold, one whom it was old Canham's delight to patronize and make much of in his humble way; whom he encouraged in all sorts of vain and delusive notions—Rupert Trevlyn. Could Mr. Chattaway have divined that bitter treason was talked against himself nearly every time Rupert dropped into the lodge, he might have tried hard to turn old Canham out of it. Harmless treason, however; consisting of rebellious words only. There was neither plotting nor hatching; old Canham and Rupert never glanced at that; both were perfectly aware that Chattaway held his place by a sure tenure, which could not be disturbed.

Many years ago, before Squire Trevlyn died, Mark Canham had grown ill in his service. In his service he had caught the violent cold which ended in an incurable rheumatic affection. The Squire settled him in the lodge, then just vacant, and allowed him five shillings a week. When the Squire died, Chattaway would have undone this. He wished to turn the old man out again (but it must be observed in a parenthesis that, though universally styled old Canham, the man was not so old in years as in appearance), and to place some one else in the lodge. I think, when there is no love lost between people, as the saying runs, each side is conscious of it. Chattaway disliked Mark Canham, and he had a shrewd suspicion that Mark returned the feeling with interest. But he found that he could not dismiss him from the lodge, for Miss Trevlyn put her veto upon it. She openly declared that Squire Trevlyn's act in placing his old servant there should be reverenced; she promised Mark that he should not be turned out of it as long as he lived. Chattaway had no resource but to bow to it; he might not cross Diana Trevlyn; but he did succeed in reducing the weekly allowance by just half. Half-a-crown per week was all the regular money enjoyed by the lodge since the time of Squire Trevlyn. Miss Diana sometimes gave a trifle from her private purse; and the gardener was allowed to make an occasional present of vegetables that were in danger of spoiling: at the beginning of winter, too, a load of wood would be stacked in the shed behind the lodge, through the forethought of Miss Diana. But it was not much altogether to keep two people upon; and Ann Canham was glad to accept a day's hard work offered her at any of the neighbouring houses, or to do a little plain sewing at home. Very fine sewing she could not do, for she suffered from her eyes, which were generally more or less inflamed.

Old Canham watched Rupert until the turnings of the avenue hid him from view, and then drew back into the room. Ann was busy with the breakfast. A loaf of oaten bread was on the bare table, and a basin of skim milk, which she had just made hot, was placed before her father. A smaller cup of it served for her own share: and that constituted their breakfast. Three mornings a week Ann Canham had the privilege of fetching a quart of skim milk from the dairy at the Hold. Chattaway growled at the extravagance of the gift, but he did no more, for it was Miss Diana's pleasure that it should be supplied.

"Chattaway 'll go a bit too far, if he don't mind," observed old Canham to his daughter, in relation to Rupert. "He must be of a bad nature, to lock him out of his own house. For the matter of that, however, he is of a bad one; and it's knowed he is."

"It is not his own, father," Ann Canham ventured to retort. "Poor Master Rupert haven't got no right to it now."

"It's a shame but what he had. Why, Chattaway has no more moral right to that there fine estate than I have!" added the old man, holding up his left arm in the heat of argument. "If Master Rupert and Miss Maude were dead,—if Joe Trevlyn had never left a child at all,—there's others would have a right to it before Chattaway."

"But Chattaway has it, father, and nobody can't alter it, or hinder his having it," sensibly returned Ann. "You'll have your milk cold."

The breakfast hour at Trevlyn Hold was early, and when Rupert entered, he found most of the family downstairs. Rupert ran upstairs to his bedroom, where he washed and refreshed himself as much as was possible after his hard night. He was one upon whom only a night's want of bed would tell seriously. When he descended to the breakfast-room, they were all assembled except Cris and Mrs. Chattaway. Cris was given to lying in bed in a morning, and the self-indulgence was permitted. Mrs. Chattaway also was apt to be late, coming down generally when breakfast was nearly over.

Rupert took his place at the breakfast-table. Mr. Chattaway, who was at that moment raising his coffee-cup to his lips, put it down and stared at him. As he might have stared at some stranger who had intruded and sat down amongst them.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"Want?" repeated Rupert, not understanding. "Only my breakfast."

"Which you will not get here," calmly and coldly returned Mr. Chattaway. "If you cannot come home to sleep at night, you shall not have your breakfast here in the morning."

"I did come home," said Rupert; "but I was not let in."

"Of course you were not. The household had retired."

"Cris came home after I did, and was allowed to enter," objected Rupert again.

"That is no business of yours," said Mr. Chattaway. "All you have to do is to obey the rules I lay down. And I will have them obeyed," he added, more sternly.

Rupert sat on, unoccupied. Octave, who was presiding at the table, did not give him any coffee; no one attempted to hand him anything to eat. Maude was seated opposite to him: he could see that the unpleasantness was agitating her painfully; that her colour went and came; that she toyed with her breakfast, but could not swallow it: least of all, dared *she* interfere to give even so much as a little dry bread to her ill-fated brother.

"Where did you sleep last night, pray?" inquired Mr. Chattaway, pausing in the midst of helping himself to some pigeon-pie, as he looked at Rupert.

"Not in this house," curtly replied Rupert. The unkindness seemed to be changing his very nature. It had continued long and long; it had been shown in many and various forms.

The master of Trevlyn Hold finished helping himself to the pie, and began eating it with apparent relish. He was about half-way through the plateful when he again stopped to address Rupert, who was sitting in silence, nothing but the table-cloth before him.

"You need not wait. If you stop there until mid-day you'll get no breakfast. Gentlemen who sleep outside do not break their fasts in my house."

Rupert pushed back his chair, and rose. Happening to glance across at Maude, he saw that her tears were dropping silently. Oh, it was an unhappy home for both! Rupert crossed the hall to the door: he thought he might as well depart at once for Blackstone. Fine as the morning was, the air, as he passed out, struck coldly upon him, and he turned back for an overcoat. Sitting up does not give any one an additional warmth.

It was in his bedroom. As he came down with it on his arm, Mrs. Chattaway was crossing the corridor. She drew him inside her sitting-room.

"I could not sleep," she murmured. "I was awake nearly all night, grieving and thinking of you. Just before daylight I dropped into a sleep, and then dreamt that you were running up to the door from the waves of the sea, which were rushing onwards to overtake you. I thought you were knocking at the door, and we could not get down to it in time, and the waters came on and on. Rupert, darling, all this is telling upon me. Why did you not come in?"

"I meant to be in, Aunt Edith; indeed I did; but I was playing at chess with George Ryle, and did not notice the

time. It was only just turned half-past when I got here; Mr. Chattaway might have let me in without any great stretch of indulgence," he added, his tone one of bitterness. "So might Cris."

"What did you do?" she asked.

"I got in at old Canham's, and lay on their settle. Don't repeat this, or it may get the Canhams into trouble."

"Have you had breakfast yet?"

"I am not to have any."

The words startled her. "Rupert!"

"Mr. Chattaway ordered me from the table. The next thing, I expect, he will be ordering me from the house. If I knew where to go I wouldn't stop in it another day. I would not, Aunt Edith."

"Have you had nothing—nothing?"

"Nothing. I would go round to the dairy and get some milk, but that I expect I should be told of. I'm off to Blackstone now. Good-bye."

The tears were filling her eyes as she lifted them in their sad yearning. He stooped and kissed her.

"Don't grieve, Aunt Edith. You can't make it better for me. I have got the cramp like anything," he carelessly observed as he went off. "It is through lying in the cold on that hard settle."

"Rupert! Rupert!"

He turned back, half in alarm. The tone was one of wild, painful entreaty.

"You will come home to-night, Rupert?"

"Yes. Depend upon me."

She remained a few minutes longer, to watch him down the avenue. He had put on his coat, and went along with slow and hesitating steps; very different from the firm, careless steps of a strong frame, springing from a happy heart. Mrs. Chattaway pressed her hands upon her brow, lost in a painful vision. If his father, her once dearly-loved brother Joe, could be looking on at the injustice done on earth, what would he think of the portion meted out to Rupert?

She descended to the breakfast-room. Mr. Chattaway had finished his breakfast and was rising. She kissed her children one by one; she sat down patiently and silently, smiling without cheerfulness. Octave passed her a cup of coffee, which was cold; and then asked her what she would take to eat. But she said she was not hungry that morning, and would eat nothing.

"Rupert's gone away without his breakfast, mamma," cried Emily. "Papa would not let him have it. Serve him right! He stayed out all night."

Mrs. Chattaway stole a glance at Maude. She was sitting pale and quiet; her air that of one who has to bear some long, wearing pain.

"If you have finished your breakfast, Maude, you can be getting ready to take the children for their walk," said Octave, speaking with her usual assumption of authority—an assumption which Maude at least might not dispute.

Mr. Chattaway left the room, and ordered his horse to be got ready. He was going to ride over his land for an hour before proceeding to Blackstone. Whilst the animal was being saddled, he rejoiced his eyes with his rich stores; the corn heaped in his barns, the fine hay-ricks in his rick-yard. All very satisfactory, very consoling to the covetous master of Trevlyn Hold.

He went out, riding hither and thither. Half-an-hour afterwards, when in the lane which skirted Mrs. Ryle's lands on the one side and his on the other, he saw another horseman before him. It was George Ryle. Mr. Chattaway touched his horse with the spur, and rode up to him at a hand gallop. George turned his head, saw it was Mr. Chattaway, and continued his way. That gentleman had been better pleased had George stopped.

"Are you hastening on to avoid me, Mr. Ryle?" he called out, in his sullen temper. "You might have seen that I wished to speak to you, by the pace at which I urged my horse."

George reined in, and turned to face Mr. Chattaway. "I saw nothing of the sort," he answered "Had I known that you wanted me, I should have stopped; but it is no unusual circumstance for me to see you riding fast about your land."

"Well, what I have to say is this: that I'd recommend you not to get Rupert Trevlyn to your house at night, and to keep him there to unreasonable hours."

George paused. "I don't understand you, Mr. Chattaway."

"Don't you?" retorted that gentleman. "I'm not talking Dutch. Rupert Trevlyn has taken to frequent your house of late; it's not altogether good for him."

"Do you fear that he will get any harm in it?" quietly asked George.

"I think it would be better for him that he should stay away.

Is the Hold not sufficient for him to spend his evenings in, but he must seek amusement elsewhere? I shall be obliged to you not to encourage his visits."

"Mr. Chattaway," said George, his face full of earnestness, as he turned it to that gentleman's, "it appears to me that you are labouring under some mistake, or you would certainly not speak to me as you are now doing. I do not encourage Rupert to my mother's house, in one sense of the word; I never press for his visits. When he does come, I show myself happy to see him and make him welcome—as I should do by any other visitor. Common courtesy demands this of me."

"You do press for his visits," said Mr. Chattaway.

"I do not," firmly repeated George. "Shall I tell you why I do not? I have no wish but to be open in the matter. An impression has seated itself in my mind that his visits to our house displease you, and therefore I have not encouraged them."

Perhaps Mr. Chattaway was rather taken back at this answer. At any rate, he made no reply to it.

"But to receive him courteously when he does come, I cannot help doing," continued George. "I shall do it still, Mr. Chattaway. If Trevlyn Farm is to be a forbidden house to Rupert, it is not from our side that the interdict shall come. So long as Rupert pays us these visits of friendship—and what harm you can think they do him, or why he should not pay them, I am unable to conceive—so long he will be met with a welcome."

"Do you say this to oppose me?"

"Far from it. If you will look at the case in an unprejudiced light, you may perhaps see that I speak in accordance with the commonest usages of civility. To close the doors of our house on Rupert when there exists no reason why they should be closed—and most certainly he has given us none—would be a breach of good feeling and good manners that we might blush to be guilty of."

"You have been opposing me all the later years of your life, George Ryle. From that past time when I wished to place you with Wall and Barnes, you have done nothing but act in opposition to me."

"I have forgiven that," said George, pointedly, a glow rising to his face at the recollection. "As to any other opposition, I am unconscious of it. You have given me advice occasionally respecting the farm; but the advice has not in general tallied

with my own opinion, and therefore I have not taken it. If you call that opposing you, Mr. Chattaway, I cannot help it."

"I see you have been mending that fence in the three-cornered paddock," remarked Mr. Chattaway, passing to another subject, and speaking in a different tone. Possibly, he had had enough of the last.

"Yes," said George. "You would not mend it, and therefore I have had it done. I cannot let my cattle get into the pound. I shall deduct the expense from the rent."

"You'll not," said Mr. Chattaway. "I won't be at the cost of a penny-piece of it."

"Oh yes, you will," returned George, equably. "The damage was done by your team, through your waggoner's carelessness, and the cost of making it good lies with you. Have you anything more to say to me?" he asked, after a pause. "I am very busy this morning."

"Only this," replied Mr. Chattaway, in significant tones. "That the more you encourage Rupert Trevlyn, by making him a companion, the worse it will be for him."

George lifted his hat in salutation: he could only be a gentleman, even to Chattaway. The master of Trevlyn Hold replied by an ungracious nod, and turned his horse back down the lane. As George rode on, he met Edith and Emily Chattaway—the children, as Octave had styled them—running towards him at full speed. They had seen their father, and were hastening after him. Maude came up more leisurely. George stooped to shake hands with her.

"You look pale and ill, Maude," he said, his low voice full of sympathy, his hand retaining hers. "Is it about Rupert?"

"Yes," she replied, striving to keep down her tears. "He was not allowed to come in last night. He has been sent away without breakfast this morning."

"I know all about it," said George. "I met Rupert just now, and he told me. I asked him if he would go to Nora for some breakfast—I could not do less, you know," added George, musingly, as if debating the question with himself. "But he declined. I am almost glad he did."

Maude was surprised. "Why?" she asked.

"Because I have an idea—I have felt it for some time—that any attention show to Rupert, no matter by whom, only makes his position worse with Chattaway. And Chattaway has now confirmed it, Maude, by telling me so."

Maude's eyelids drooped. "Oh, how sad it is!" she ex-

claimed, with emotion—"and for one in his weak state! If he were only strong as the rest of us are, it would be of less importance. I fear—I do fear that he must have slept under the trees in the avenue," she continued, lifting her eyes in her distress. "Mr. Chattaway inquired where he had passed the night, and Rupert answered——"

"I can relieve your fears so far, Maude," interrupted George, glancing round, as if to make sure that no ears were near. "He was at old Canham's."

Maude heaved a deep sigh in her relief. "You are certain, George?"

"Yes, yes. Rupert told me so just now. He said how hard he found the settle. Here come your charges back again, Maude; so I will say good-bye."

She suffered her hand to linger in his, but her heart was too full to speak. George bent lower.

"Do not make the grief heavier than you can bear, Maude. It *is* grief—real grief; but happier times may be in store for Rupert—and for you."

He released her hand, and cantered down the lane; and the two girls came up, telling Maude that they should go home now, for they had walked long enough.

CHAPTER XV.

TORMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF TREVLYN HOLD.

THERE appeared to be no place on earth for Rupert Trevlyn. Most people have some little nook they can fit themselves into and call their own; but he had none. He was only on sufferance at the Hold: he was made to feel stranger and stranger in it day by day.

What could be the source of this ill-feeling towards Rupert? Did some latent dread exist in the heart of Mr. Chattaway, and from thence penetrate to that of Cris, whispering that he, Rupert, the true heir of Trevlyn Hold, might at some future day, through some unforeseen and apparently impossible chance, come into his rights? No doubt it was so. There are no other means of accounting for it. It may be, they deemed that the more effectually he was kept under, treated as an object to be despised, lowered from his proper station, the less

chance would there be of that covert dread growing into a certainty. Whatever may have been its cause, Rupert was shamefully put upon. It is true that he sat at their table at meals—that he sat in the same sitting-room. But at table he was placed below the rest, at any inconvenient corner, where there was no room for his legs or his plate; where he was served last, and from the plainest dish. Mrs. Chattaway's heart would ache; but she could not alter it; it had ached from the same cause for many a year. Maude's ached: and Maude would decline the rich viands and eat of the plainer, that it might seem less hard to Rupert. In their evenings, when the rest were gathered round the fire, Rupert would be pushed back with the remote chairs and tables, and left there to make the best of the cold. Nothing in the world was so coveted by Rupert Trevlyn as a warm seat by the fire. It had been coveted by his father when he was Rupert's age, and perhaps Miss Diana remembered this, for she would call Rupert forward to the fire, and sharply rebuke those who would have kept him from it.

But Miss Diana was not always in the room; not often, in fact. She had her private sitting-room upstairs, as Mrs. Chattaway had hers; and both ladies more frequently retired to them in an evening, leaving the younger ones to enjoy themselves, with their books and their work, their music and their games, unrestrained by their presence. And poor Rupert was condemned to the remoter quarters of the room, where no one noticed him.

From that point alone, the cold, it was a bitter trial. Of weakly constitution, shivery by nature, a good fire was to Rupert Trevlyn almost an essential of existence. And it was what he rarely had at Trevlyn Hold. No wonder he was driven out. Even old Canham's wood fire, that he might get right into if he pleased, was an improvement upon the drawing-room at Trevlyn Hold.

But this digression is not getting on with the story, and you will not thank me for it. After parting with George Ryle, Maude Trevlyn, in obedience to the imperious mandates of her pupils, turned her steps homewards. Emily was a boisterous, troublesome, disobedient girl; Edith was more gentle, more amiable, in looks and disposition resembling her mother; but the example of her sisters was infectious, and spoiled her. There was another daughter, Amelia, older than they were, and at school at Barmester: a very disagreeable girl indeed.

"What was George Ryle saying to you, Maude?" somewhat insolently asked Emily.

"He was talking of Rupert," she incautiously answered, her mind buried in thought.

When they reached the Hold, Mr. Chattaway's horse was being led about by a groom, waiting for its master, who had returned, and was indoors. As they crossed the hall, they met him coming out of the breakfast-room. Octave was with him, talking.

"Cris would have waited, no doubt, papa, had he known you wanted him. He ate his breakfast in a hurry, and went out. I suppose he has gone to Blackstone."

"I particularly wanted him," grumbled Mr. Chattaway, who never was pleasant-tempered at the best of times, but would show himself unbearable if put out. "Cris knew I should want him this morning. First Rupert, and then Cris! Are you all going to turn disobedient?"

He made a halt at the door when he came to it, putting on his riding-glove. They stood grouped around him—Octave, Maude, and Emily. Edith had run out, and was near the horse.

"I would give a crown-piece to know what Mr. Rupert did with himself last night," he savagely uttered. "John," exalting his voice, "have you any idea where Rupert Trevlyn hid himself all night?"

The locking-out had been known to the household; had afforded it considerable gossip. John had taken part in it; had joined in its surmises and its comments; therefore he was not at fault for a ready answer.

"I don't know nothing certain, sir. It ain't unlikely as he went down to the Sheaf o' Corn, and slep' there."

"No, no, he did not," involuntarily burst from Maude.

It was an unlucky admission, for its tone was decisive, implying that she knew where he did sleep. She spoke in the moment's impulse. The Sheaf of Corn was the nearest public-house; it was notorious for its irregular doings, and Maude felt shocked at the bare suggestion that Rupert would enter such a place.

Mr. Chattaway turned to her. "Where *did* he sleep? What do you know about it?"

Maude's face turned hot and cold. She opened her lips to answer, but closed them again without speaking, the words dying away in her uncertainty and hesitation.

Mr. Chattaway may have felt surprised. He knew perfectly well that Maude had held no communication with Rupert that morning. He had seen Rupert come in; he had seen him go out; and Maude, the whole of the time, had not stirred from his presence. He bent his cold grey eyes upon her.

"From whom have you been hearing of Rupert's doings?"

It is very probable that Maude would have been quite at a loss for an answer. To say, "I know nothing of where Rupert slept," would have violated the rules of truth; but to avow that the lodge had sheltered him would not be expedient, for its inmates' sake. Maude, however, was saved a reply, for Emily spoke up before she had time to give one, ill-nature in her tone and in her words.

"Maude must have heard it from George Ryle. You saw her talking to him, papa. She said he had been speaking of Rupert."

Mr. Chattaway did not ask another question. It would have been superfluous to do so, in the conclusion he had come to. He believed that Rupert had slept at Trevlyn Farm. How else could George Ryle have had cognizance of his movements?

"They'll be hatching a plot to try to overthrow me," he muttered to himself as he went out to his horse: for his was one of those mean, suspicious natures which are always fancying the world is putting itself in antagonism to them. "Maude Ryle has been wanting to get me out of Trevlyn Hold ever since I came into it. From the very hour when she heard the Squire's will read, and found I had inherited, she has been planning and plotting for it. She'd rather see Rupert in it than me; and she'd rather see her pitiful son Treve in it than any. Yes, yes, Mr. Rupert, we know what you frequent Trevlyn Farm for. But it won't answer. It's waste of plans and waste of time; it's waste of wickedness. They must do away with England's laws before they can upset Squire Trevlyn's will. I'm safe in the estate. But it's not less annoying to know that my tenure is constantly being plotted against; hauled over and peered into, and turned and twisted about, to see if they can't find a flaw in it, or insert one of their own manufacture."

It was a strange thing that these fears should continually hold possession of the mind of the master of Trevlyn Hold. Not suspicion touching the plotting and the hatching; *that* came naturally to him; but latent fears lest his ownership should be shaken. A man who legally holds an estate, on which no shade of a suspicion can be cast, need not dread its

being wrested from him. It was in Squire Trevlyn's power to leave the Hold and its revenues to whom he would. Had he chosen to bequeath it to an utter stranger, it was in his power to do so: and he had bequeathed it to James Chattaway. Failing direct male heirs, it may be thought that Mr. Chattaway had as much right to it as any one else. At any rate, it had been the Squire's pleasure to bequeath it to him, and there the matter was at an end. *It was looked upon as at an end by every one except Chattaway.* Why, I say, should it not have been looked upon as at an end by him? Ay, there's the mystery. None can fathom the curious workings of the human heart. That the master of Trevlyn Hold was ever conscious of a dread that his tenure was to be some time disturbed, was indisputable. He never betrayed it to any living being by so much as a word; he strove to conceal it even from himself; he pretended to ignore it altogether: but there it was, down deep in his secret heart. There it remained, and there it tormented him; however unwilling he might have been to acknowledge the fact.

Could it be that a prevision of what was really to take place was cast upon him?—a mysterious foreshadowing of the future. There are people who tell us that such warnings come.

The singularity of the affair was, that no grounds could exist for this latent fear. Why, then, should it show itself? In point of right and justice, Rupert Trevlyn was undoubtedly the true heir; but right and justice cannot contend against law, as we know by the instances daily presented to our notice; and there was no more chance that Rupert could succeed in face of the Squire's will, than that old Canham at the lodge could succeed. Had the Squire's two sons been living, he could have willed the estate to Chattaway, had he chosen. Whence, then, arose the fear? Why, from that source whence it arises in many people—a bad conscience. It was true the estate had been legally left to him; he was secure in it by the power of the law; but he knew that his own handiwork, his deceit, had brought it to him; he knew that when he suppressed the news of the birth of Rupert, and suffered Squire Trevlyn to go to his grave uninformed of the fact, he was guilty of nothing less than a crime in the sight of God. Mr. Chattaway had heard of that inconvenient thing, retribution, and his fancy suggested that it might possibly overtake *him.*

If he had only known that he might have set his mind at rest as to the plotting and planning, he would have cared less to

oppose Rupert's visits to Trevlyn Farm. Nothing could be further from the thoughts of Rupert, or from George Ryle, than any plotting against Chattaway. Their evenings, when together, were spent in harmless conversation, in chess, in other rational ways, without so much as a reference to Chattaway. But that gentleman did not know it, and tormented himself accordingly.

He mounted his horse, and rode away. As he was passing Trevlyn Farm, buried in unpleasant thoughts, which of course turned upon that terrible bugbear of his life, hatching and plotting, he saw Nora Dickson at the fold-yard gate. A thought struck him, and he turned his horse's head towards her.

"How came your people to give Rupert Trevlyn a bed last night? They must know it would very much displease me."

"Give Rupert Trevlyn a bed!" repeated Nora, regarding Mr. Chattaway with the uncompromising stare which she was fond of according to that gentleman. "He did not have a bed here."

"No!" replied Mr. Chattaway.

"No," reiterated Nora. "What should he want with a bed here? Has he not his own at Trevlyn Hold? One bed there isn't much for him, when he might have expected to own the whole place; but I suppose he can at least count upon that."

Mr. Chattaway turned his horse short round, and rode away without another word. He always got the worst of it with Nora. A slight explosion of his private sentiments with regard to her was given to the air, and he again became absorbed on the subject of Rupert.

"Where, then, *did* he pass the night?"

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. CHATTAWAY'S OFFICE.

It was Nora's day for churning. The butter was made twice a week at Trevlyn Farm, and the making fell to Nora. She was sole priestess of the dairy. It was many and many a long year since any one but herself had interfered in it: except, indeed, in the actual churning. One of the men on the farm did that for her in a general way: and the words, "It was Nora's day for churning," would be looked upon by any one familiar with the executive of Trevlyn Farm as a figure of speech.

In point of fact, they would have proved literally true as to this particular day. When Nora was detected at the fold-yard gate by Mr. Chattaway, idly staring up and down the road, she was looking for Jim Sanders, to order him in to churn. Not the Jim Sanders mentioned in the earlier portion of our history, but Jim's son. Jim the elder was dead: he had brought on rather too many attacks of inflammation (a disease to which he was predisposed) by his love of beer; and at last one attack worse than the rest came, and proved too much for him. The present Jim, representative of his name, was a youth of fourteen, not overburdened with brains, but strong of muscle and sound of limb, and was found handy on the farm, where he was required to make himself useful at any work that came first to hand.

Just now he was wanted to churn. The man who usually performed that duty was too busy out of doors to be spared to-day: therefore it fell to Jim. But Nora could not see Jim anywhere, and she returned indoors and commenced the work herself.

The milk at the right temperature—for Nora was too experienced a dairy-woman not to know that if she attempted to churn at the wrong one, it would be hours before the butter came—she took out the thermometer, and turned the milk into the churn. As she was doing this, the servant entered: a tall, stolid girl, remarkable for little except her height: Nanny, by name.

"Ain't nobody coming in to churn?" asked she.

"It seems not," answered Nora.

"Shall I do it?"

"Not if I know it," returned Nora. "You'd like to quit your work for this straightforward pastime, wouldn't you? Have you got the potatoes on for the pigs?"

"No," said Nanny, sullenly.

"Then go and see about it. You know it was to be done to-day. And I suppose the fire's burning and wasting away under the furnace."

Fanny stalked out of the dairy. She almost always went about in pattens, which made her look like a giantess moving in the house. Nora churned away steadily, using her arms alternately, and turning her butter on to the making-up board in about three-quarters of an hour. As she was proceeding to make it up, she saw George ride into the fold-yard, and leave his horse in the stable. Another minute and he came in.

"Has Mr. Callaway not come yet, Nora?"

"I have seen nothing of him, Mr. George."

George took out his watch: the one bequeathed him by his father. It was only a silver one—as Mr. Ryle had remarked—but George valued it as though it had been set in diamonds. He would wear that watch and no other as long as he lived. His initials were engraved on it now: G. B. R. standing for George Berkeley Ryle.

"If Callaway cannot keep his appointments better than this, I shall beg him not to make any more with me," he remarked. "The last time he came he kept me waiting three-quarters of an hour."

"Have you seen Jim Sanders this morning?" asked Nora.

"Jim Sanders? I saw him in the stables as I rode out."

"I should like to find him!" said Nora. "He is skulking somewhere. I have had to churn myself."

"Where's Roger, then?"

"Roger couldn't hinder his time indoors to-day. I say Mr. George, what's the matter up at Trevlyn Hold again about Rupert?" resumed Nora, turning from her butter to glance at George.

"Why do you ask?" was his reply.

"Chattaway rode by an hour ago when I was outside looking after Jim Sanders. He stopped his horse and asked how we came to give Rupert a bed last night, when we knew that it would displease him. Like his insolence!"

"What answer did you make?" said George, after a pause.

"I gave him one," replied Nora, significantly. "Chattaway needn't fear he'll not get an answer when he comes to me. He knows that."

"But what did you say about Rupert?"

"I said we had not given him a bed. That he had not slept here. If Chattaway——"

Nora's speech was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Chattaway's daughter, Octave. She had come to the farm, and, attracted by the sound of voices in the dairy, made her way to it at once. Miss Chattaway had taken it into her head lately to be friendly at Trevlyn Farm, honouring it with frequent visits. Mrs. Ryle neither encouraged nor repulsed her. She was civilly indifferent; but the young lady chose to take that as a welcome. Nora did not show her much greater favour than she was in the habit of showing her father. She bent her

head over her butter-board, as if unaware that any one had entered.

George took off his hat which he had been wearing, as she stepped on to the cold floor of the dairy, and took the hand which was held out to him.

"Are you quite well, Miss Chattaway?"

"Who would have thought of seeing you at home at this hour?" she exclaimed, in the pretty, winning manner which she could put on at times, and which she always did put on to George Ryle.

"And in Nora's dairy, watching her make up the butter!" he answered, in his pleasant, laughing tone. "The fact is, I have an appointment with a gentleman this morning, and he is keeping me waiting and making me angry. I can't spare the time to be indoors."

"You look angry!" exclaimed Octave, laughing at him.

"Looks go far enough," returned George.

"Is your harvest nearly in?"

"If this fine weather only lasts four or five days longer, it will be all in. We have had a glorious harvest this year. I hope every one's as thankful for it as I am."

"You have some especial cause to be thankful for it?" she observed.

"I have."

She had spoken lightly, and the strangely earnest answer struck upon her. George could have said that but for that plentiful harvest they might not quite so soon have discharged her father's debt.

"When shall you hold your harvest-home?"

"Next Thursday; this day week," replied George. "Will you come to it?"

"Thank you very much," said Octave. "Yes, I will."

Had it been to save his life, George Ryle could not have helped the surprise in his eyes, as he turned them on Octave Chattaway. He had asked the question in the careless gaiety of the moment; really not intending it as an invitation. If he had meant it as an invitation, and proffered it in all earnestness, he never would have supposed it one to be accepted by Octave. Mr. Chattaway's family had not been in the habit of visiting at Trevlyn Farm.

"In for a penny, in for a pound," thought George. "I don't know what Mrs. Ryle will say to this; but if *she* comes, some of the rest shall come also."

It almost seemed as if Octave had divined part of his thoughts. "I must ask my aunt Ryle whether she will have me. I shall tell her, by way of bribe, that I delight in harvest-homes."

"We must have you all," said George. "Your sisters and Maude. Treve will be at home I expect, and the Apperleys will be here."

"Who else will be here?" asked Octave. "But I don't know about my sisters and Maude."

"Mr. and Mrs. Freeman. They and the Apperleys always come."

"That starched old parson!" uttered Octave. "Does *he* come to a harvest-home? He is not a favourite with us at the Hold."

"I think he is with your mamma."

"Oh, mamma's nobody. Of course we are civil to the Freemans, and exchange dull visits with them once or twice a-year. You must be passably civil to the parson you sit under."

There was a pause. Octave advanced nearer to Nora, who had gone on diligently with her work, never turning her head, or noticing Miss Chattaway by so much as a look. Octave drew close and watched her.

"How industrious you are, Nora!—just as if you enjoyed the occupation. I should not like to soil my hands, making up butter."

"There are some might make it up in white kid gloves," retorted Nora. "The butter wouldn't be any the better for it, Miss Chattaway."

At this juncture Mrs. Ryle's voice was heard, and Octave left the dairy in search of her. George was about to follow when Nora stopped him.

"What is the meaning of this new friendship for us here—these morning calls, and proffered evening visits?" she asked; her voice full of seriousness, her eyes thrown keenly on George's face.

"How should I know?" he carelessly replied.

"If you don't, I do," she said. "Can you take care of yourself, George Ryle?"

"I believe I can."

"Then do," said Nora, with an emphatic nod. "And don't despise my caution: perhaps you may want it."

He laughed in his light-heartedness: but he did not tell Nora how unnecessary her warning was.

Later in the day, George Ryle had business which took him

to Blackstone. It was not an inviting ride. The place, as he drew near, had that flat, dreary aspect peculiar to the neighbourhood of mines. Rows of black and smoky huts were to be seen, the dwellings of the men who worked in the pits; and little children ran about with naked legs and tattered clothing, whose thin faces were white and squalid.

"Is it the perpetual *dirt* they live in that makes these children look so unhealthy?" thought George—a question he had asked himself a hundred times. "I believe the mothers never wash them. Perhaps they think it would be a work of supererogation, where all around is so black—even the very atmosphere."

Black, indeed! Within George's view at that moment might be seen high chimneys congregating in all directions, throwing out volumes of smoke and flame. Numerous works were established around, connected with iron and other productions of the rich mines which abounded in the neighbourhood. Valuable land for the use of man—for the furtherance of civilization, the increase of wealth; but not pleasant to the eye, as compared with the luxuriance of other spots, with their bright air, their green meadows and blossoming trees.

The office belonging to Mr. Chattaway's colliery stood in a particularly dreary offshoot from the main road. It was a low but not very small building, facing the road on one side, looking to those tall chimneys and the dreary country on two of the others. On the fourth was a sort of enclosed yard or waste ground, which appeared to contain nothing but different heaps of coal, a peculiar description of barrow, and some round shallow baskets. The building looked like a great shed; it was roofed over, and divided inside into partitions.

As George rode by, he saw Rupert standing at the narrow entrance door, leaning against its side, as if in fatigue or idleness. Ford, the clerk, a young man accustomed to take life easily, and to give himself little concern as to how it went, was standing near, his hands in his pockets. To see them thus, doing nothing, was sufficient to tell George that Chattaway was not about, and he rode up to the office.

"You look tired, Rupert."

"I am tired," answered Rupert. "If things are to go on like this, I shall grow tired of life altogether."

"Not yet," said George, cheeringly. "You may talk of that, perhaps, some fifty years hence."

Rupert made no answer. The sunlight fell on his fair features, on his golden hair. There was a haggardness in

those features, a melancholy in the dark blue eyes, that George did not like to see. Ford, the clerk, who was humming the verse of a song, cut short the melody, and addressed George.

"He has been in this gay state all the afternoon, sir. A charming companion for a fellow! It's a good thing I'm pretty jolly myself, or we might both get consigned to the county asylum; two cases of melancholy madness. I hope he won't make a night of it again, that's all. Nothing wears out a chap for the next day like a night without bed, and no breakfast at the end of it."

"It isn't that," said Rupert. "I'm sick of it altogether. There has been nothing but a row here all day, George—ask Ford. Chattaway has been on at us all. First, he attacked me. He demanded where I slept, and I wouldn't tell him. Next, he attacked Cris—a most unusual thing—and Cris has not got over it yet. He has gone galloping off, to gallop his ill-temper away."

"Chattaway has?"

"Not Chattaway; Cris. Cris never came here until one o'clock, and Chattaway had wanted him, and a row ensued. Next, Ford came in for it: he had made a mistake in his entries. Something had uncommonly put out Chattaway—that was certain. And to improve his temper, the inspector of collieries came to-day and found fault, ordering things to be done that Chattaway says he won't do."

"Where's Chattaway now?"

"Oh, he's gone home. I wish I was there," added Rupert, "without the trouble of walking. Chattaway has been ordering a load of coals to the Hold. If they were going this evening instead of to-morrow morning, I protest I'd take my seat upon them, and get home that way."

"Are you so very tired?" asked George.

"Dead beat."

"It's the sitting up," put in Ford again. "I don't think much of that kind of thing will do for Mr. Rupert Trevlyn."

"Perhaps it wouldn't do for you," grumbled Rupert.

"George prepared to ride away. "Have you had any dinner, Rupert?" he asked.

"I made an attempt, but my appetite had gone by. Chattaway was here till past two o'clock, and after that I wasn't hungry."

"He tried some bread-and-cheese," said Ford. "I told

him if he'd get a piece of steak I'd cook it for him, if he was too tired to cook it himself; but he didn't."

"I must be gone," said George. "You will not have left in half-an-hour's time, shall you, Rupert?"

"No; nor in an hour either."

George rode off over the stony ground, and they looked after him. Then Ford bethought himself of a message he was charged to deliver at one of the pits, and Rupert went indoors and sat down to the desk on his high stool.

Within the half-hour George Ryle was back again. He rode up to the door, and dismounted. Rupert came forward, a pen in hand.

"Are you ready to go home now, Rupert?"

Rupert shook his head. "Ford went to the pit, and is not back yet; and I have a lot of writing to do. Why?"

"I thought we would have gone home together. You shall ride my horse, and I'll walk; it will tire you less than going on foot."

"You are very kind, George," said Rupert. "Yes, I should like to ride. I was thinking just now, that if Cris were worth anything, he'd let me ride his horse home. But he's not worth anything, and he'd no more let me ride his horse and walk himself, than he'd let me ride him."

"Has Cris not gone home?"

"I fancy not. Unless he has gone by without calling in. Will you wait, George?"

"No. I must walk on. But I'll leave you the horse. You can leave it at the Farm, Rupert, and walk the rest of the way."

"I can ride on to the Hold, and send it back."

George hesitated a moment before he spoke. "I would prefer that you should leave it at the Farm, Rupert. It will not be far for you to walk after that."

Rupert acquiesced. Did he wonder why he might not ride the horse to the Hold? George would not say to him, "Because even that slight attention must, if possible, be kept from Chattaway."

He fastened the bridle to a hook in the wall, where Mr. Chattaway often tied his horse, where Cris sometimes tied his. There was a stable near; but unless they were going to remain in the office or about the pits, Mr. Chattaway and his son seldom put up their horses.

George Ryle walked away with a quick step, and Rupert returned to his desk. A quarter-of-an-hour passed on, and the

clerk, Ford, did not return. Rupert grew impatient for his arrival, and went to the door to look out for him. He did not see Ford; but he did see Cris Chattaway. Cris was approaching on foot, at a snail's pace, leading his horse, which was dead lame.

"Here's a nice bother!" called out Cris. "How I am to get back home, I don't know."

"What has happened?" returned Rupert.

"Can't you see what has happened? *How* it happened, I am unable to tell you. All I know is, the horse fell suddenly lame, and whined like a child. Something must have run into his foot, I conclude: is there still, perhaps? Whose horse is that? Why, it's George Ryle's," concluded Cris, in the same breath, as he drew sufficiently near to recognize it. "What brings his horse here."

"He has lent it to me, to save my walking home," said Rupert.

"Where is he? Here?"

"He has gone home on foot. I can't think where Ford's lingering," added Rupert, walking into the yard, and mounting one of the smaller heaps of coal for a better view of the road from the colliery, by which Ford might be expected to arrive. "He has been gone this hour."

Cris was walking off in the direction of the stable, carefully leading his horse. "What are you going to do with him?" asked Rupert. "To leave him in the stable?"

"Until I can get home and send the groom for him. *I'm* not going to cool my heels, dragging him home," retorted Cris.

Rupert retired indoors, and sat down on the high stool. He still had some accounts to make up. They had to be done that evening; and as Ford did not come in to do them, he must. Had Ford been there, Rupert would have left him to do it, and gone home at once.

"I wonder how many years of my life I am to wear out in this lively place?" thought Rupert, after five minutes of uninterrupted attention given to his work, which slightly progressed in consequence. "It's a shame that I should be put to it. A paid fellow at ten shillings a week would do it better than I. If Chattaway had a spark of good feeling in him, he'd put me into a farm. It would be better for me altogether, and more fitting for a Trevlyn. Catch him at it! He wouldn't let me be my own master for——"

A sound as of a horse trotting off from the door interrupted

Rupert's cogitations. He came down from his stool. A thought crossed him that George Ryle's horse might have got loose, and be speeding home riderless, at his own will and pleasure.

It was George Ryle's horse, but not riderless. To Rupert's intense astonishment, he saw Mr. Cris mounted on him, leisurely riding away.

"Halloa!" called Rupert, speeding after the horse and his rider. "What are you going to do with that horse, Cris?"

Cris turned his head, but did not stop. "I'm going to ride him home. His having been left here just happens right for me."

"You get off," shouted Rupert. "The horse was lent to me, not to you. Do you hear, Cris?"

Cris heard, but did not stop: he was urging the horse on. "*You* don't want him," he roughly said. "You can walk, as you always do."

Further remonstrance, further following, was useless. Rupert's words were drowned in the echoes of the horse's hoofs, galloping away in the distance. Rupert stood, white with anger, impotent to stop him, his hands stretched out on the empty air, as if their action could arrest the horse and bring him back again. Certainly the mortification was bitter; the circumstance precisely one of those likely to excite the choler of an excitable nature; and Rupert was on the point of going into that dangerous fit of madness known as the Trevlyn passion, when its course was turned aside by a hand being laid upon his shoulder.

He turned, it may almost be said, savagely. Ford was standing there out of breath, his good-humoured face red with the exertion of running.

"I say, Mr. Rupert, you'll do a fellow a service, won't you? I have had a message that my mother's taken suddenly ill; a fit, they say, of some sort. Will you finish what there is to do here, and lock up for once, so that I can go home directly?"

Rupert nodded. In his passionate disappointment, at having to walk home when he expected to ride, at being put upon, treated as of no moment by Cris Chattaway, it seemed of little consequence to him how long he remained, or what work he had to do: and the clerk, waiting for no further permission, sped away with a fleet foot. Rupert's face was losing its deathly whiteness—there is no whiteness like that born of passion or of sudden terror; and when he sat down again to the desk, the hectic of reaction was shining in his cheeks and lips.

Well, oh, well for him, could these dangerous fits of passion have been always arrested on the threshold, as this had been arrested now! The word dangerous is used advisedly: they brought nothing less than danger in their train.

But, alas! this was not to be.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAD BEAT.

NORA was at some business or other in the fold-yard, when the man-servant at Trevlyn Hold, more especially devoted to the service of Cris Chattaway, came in at the gate with George Ryle's horse. As he passed Nora on his way to the stables, she turned round, and the man spoke.

"Mr. Ryle's horse, ma'am. Shall I take it on?"

"You know the way," was Nora's short answer. She did not regard the man with any favour, reflecting upon him, in her usual partial fashion, the dislike she entertained for his master and for Trevlyn Hold in general. "Mr. Trevlyn has sent it, I suppose?"

"Mr. Trevlyn!" repeated the groom, betraying some surprise.

Now, it was a fact that at Trevlyn Hold Rupert was never called "Mr. Trevlyn." That it was his proper style and title, was indisputable; but Mr. Chattaway had as great a dislike to hear Rupert called by it as he had a wish to hear himself styled "the Squire." At the Hold, Rupert was "Mr. Rupert" only, and the neighbourhood generally had fallen into the same familiar style when speaking of or to him. Nora supposed the man's repetition of the name had insolent reference to this; as much as to say, "Who's Mr. Trevlyn?"

"Yes, Mr. Trevlyn," she resumed, in a sharp tone of reprimand. "He is Mr. Trevlyn, Sam Atkins, and you know that he is, however some people may wish that it should be forgotten. He is not Mr. Rupert, and he is not Mr. Rupert Trevlyn, but he is Mr. Trevlyn; and if he had his rights, he'd be Squire Trevlyn. There! you may go and tell your master that I said it."

Sam Atkins, a civil, quiet young fellow, was overpowered with astonishment at Nora's burst of eloquence. "I'm not

saying naught again it, ma'am," cried he, when he had recovered himself sufficiently to speak. "But Mr. Rupert didn't send me with the horse at all. It was young Mr. Chattaway."

"What had he to do with it?" resentfully asked Nora.

"He rode it home from Blackstone."

"*He* rode it? Cris Chattaway!"

"Yes," said the groom. "He has just got home now, and he told me to bring the horse back at once."

Nora pointed to the man to take the horse on to the stable, and went indoors. She could not understand it. When George returned home on foot, and she inquired what he had done with his horse, he told her that he had left it at Blackstone for Rupert Trevlyn. To hear now that it was Cris who had had the benefit of it, and not Rupert, excited Nora's indignation. But the indignation would have increased fourfold had she known that Mr. Cris had ridden the horse hard, and made a *détour* of some five miles out of his way, to transact a matter of private business of his own. She went straight to George, who was seated at tea with Mrs. Ryle.

"Mr. George, I thought you told me you had left your horse at Blackstone for Rupert Trevlyn, to save his walking home?"

"So I did," replied George.

"Then it's Cris Chattaway who has come home on it. I'd see *him* far enough before he should have the use of my horse!"

"It can't be," returned George. "You must be mistaken, Nora; Cris had his own horse there."

"You can go and ask for yourself," rejoined Nora, in crusty tones, not at all liking to be told that she was mistaken. "Sam Atkins is putting the horse in the stable, and he says it was Cris Chattaway who rode it from Blackstone."

George did go and ask for himself. He could not understand it at all; and he had no more fancy for allowing Cris Chattaway the use of his horse than Nora had. He supposed they had exchanged steeds; though why they should do so, he could not imagine: that Cris had used his, and Rupert the one belonging to Cris.

Sam Atkins was in the stable, talking to Roger, one of the men about the farm. George saw at a glance that his horse had been ridden hard.

"Who rode this horse home?" he inquired, as the groom touched his hat to him.

"Young Mr. Chattaway, sir."

"And Mr. Rupert: what did he ride?"

"Mr. Rupert, sir? I don't think he is come home.

"Where's Mr. Cris Chattaway's own horse?"

"He have left it at Blackstone, sir. It fell dead lame, he says. I be going for it now."

George paused. "I lent my horse to Mr. Rupert," he said. "Do you know how it was that he did not use it himself?"

"I don't know nothing about it, sir. Mr. Cris came home just now on your horse, and told me to bring it down here immediate. His orders was, to go on to Blackstone for his, and to mind I led it gently home. He never mentioned Mr. Rupert."

Considerably later—in fact, it was past nine o'clock—Rupert Trevlyn appeared. George Ryle was leaning over the gate at the foot of his garden in a musing attitude, the bright stars above him, the slight frost of the autumn night rendering the air clear, though not cold, when he saw a figure come slowly winding up the road. It was Rupert Trevlyn. The same misfortune seemed to have befallen him that had befallen the horse, for he limped as he walked.

"Are you lame, Rupert?" asked George.

"Lame with fatigue; nothing else," answered Rupert in that low, half-inaudible voice which a very depressed physical state will induce. "Let me come in and sit down half-an-hour, George, or I shall never get to the Hold."

"How was it that you let Cris Chattaway ride my horse home? I left it for you?"

"*Let* him! He mounted and galloped off without my knowing—the sneak! I should be ashamed to be guilty of such a trick. I declare I had half a mind to ride his horse home, lame as it was. But that the poor animal is evidently in pain, I would have done it!"

"You are very late."

"I have been such a time coming. The truth is, I sat down when I was half-way here; I was so dead tired I couldn't stir a step; and I dropped asleep."

"A very wise proceeding!" cried George, in pleasant though mocking tones. He did not care to say more plainly how *un*wise—nay, how pernicious—it might be for Rupert Trevlyn. "Did you sleep long?"

"Pretty well. The stars were out when I awoke; and I felt

ten times more tired when I got up than I had felt when I sat down."

George placed him in the most comfortable arm-chair they had, and got him a glass of wine. Nora brought some refreshment, but Rupert could not eat.

"Try it," urged George.

"I can't," said Rupert; "I am completely done over."

He leaned back in the chair, his fair curls falling on the cushions, his bright face—bright with a touch of inward fever—turned upwards to the light. Gradually his eyelids closed, and he dropped into a calm sleep.

George sat watching him. Mrs. Ryle, who was still poorly, had retired to her chamber for the night, and they were alone. Very unkindly, as may be thought, George woke him soon, and told him it was time to go.

"Do not deem me inhospitable, Rupert; but it will not do for you to be locked out again to-night."

"What's the time?" asked Rupert.

"Considerably past ten."

"I was in such a nice dream. I thought I was being carried along in a large sail belonging to a ship. The motion was pleasant and soothing. Past ten! What a bother! I shall be half dead again before I get to the Hold."

"I'll lend you my arm, Ru, to help you along."

"That's a good fellow!" exclaimed Rupert.

He got up and stretched himself, and then fell back in his chair, like a leaden weight. "I'd give five shillings to be there without the trouble of walking," quoth he.

"Rupert, you will be late."

"I can't help it," returned Rupert, folding his arms and leaning back again in the chair. "If Chattaway locks me out again, he must. I'll sit down in the portico until morning, for I shan't be able to stir another step from it."

Rupert was in that physically depressed state which reacts upon the mind. It may be said that he was as incapable of *care* as of exertion: whether he got in or not, whether he passed the night in a comfortable bed, or under the trees in the avenue, seemed of very little moment in his present state of feeling. Altogether he was some time getting off; and they heard the far-off church clock at Barbrook chime out the half-past ten before they were half-way to the Hold. The sound came distinctly to their ears on the calm night air.

"I was somewhere about this spot when the half-hour struck

last night, for your clocks were fast," remarked Rupert. "I ran all the way home after that—with what success, you know. I can't run to-night."

"I'll do my best to get you in," said George. "I hope I shan't be tempted, though, to speak my mind too plainly to Chattaway."

The Hold was closed for the night. Lights appeared in several of the windows. Rupert halted when he saw the light in one of them. "Aunt Diana must have returned," he said; "that's her room."

George Ryle rang a loud, quick peal at the bell. It was not answered. He then rang again, a sharp, imperative, urgent peal, and shouted out with his stentorian voice; a prolonged shout that could not have come from the lungs of Rupert; and it brought Mr. Chattaway to the window of his wife's dressing-room in very surprise. One or two more windows in different parts of the house were thrown up.

"It is I, Mr. Chattaway. I have been assisting Rupert home. Will you be so kind as to allow the door to be opened?"

Mr. Chattaway was nearly struck dumb with the insolence of the demand, coming from the quarter it did. He could scarcely speak at first, even to refuse.

"He does not deserve your displeasure to-night," said George, in his clear, ringing voice, which might be heard distinctly ever so far off. "He could scarcely get here from fatigue and illness. But for taking a rest at my mother's house, and having the help of my arm up here, I question if he would have got as far. Be so good as to let him in, Mr. Chattaway."

"How dare you make such a request to me?" roared Mr. Chattaway, recovering himself a little. "How dare you come disturbing the peace of my house at night, George Ryle, as any housebreaker might come—except that you make more noise about it!"

"I came to bring Rupert," was George's clear answer. "He is waiting here to be let in; he is tired and ill."

"I will not let him in," raved Mr. Chattaway. "How dare you, I ask?"

"What *is* all this?" broke from the amazed voice of Miss Diana Trevlyn. "What does it mean? I don't comprehend it in the least."

George looked up at her window. "Rupert could not get

home by the hour specified by Mr. Chattaway—half-past ten. I am asking that he may be admitted now, Miss Trevlyn."

"Of course he can be admitted," said Miss Diana.

"Of course he shan't," retorted Mr. Chattaway.

"Who says he couldn't get home in time if he had wanted to come?" called out Cris from a window on the upper story. "Does it take him five or six hours to walk from Blackstone?"

"Is that you, Christopher?" asked George, falling a little back that he might see him better. "I want to speak to you. By what right did you take possession of my horse at Blackstone this afternoon, and ride him home?"

"I chose to do it," said Cris.

"I lent that horse to Rupert, who was unfit to walk. It had been more in accordance with generosity—though you may not understand the word—had you left it for him. He was not in bed last night; he has gone without food to-day—you were more capable of walking home than he."

Miss Diana craned forth her neck. "Chattaway, I must inquire into this. Let that front-door be opened."

"I will not," he answered. And he banged down his window with a resolute air, as if to avoid further colloquy.

But in that same moment the lock of the front-door was turned, and it was thrown open by Octave Chattaway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. CHATTAWAY'S "OLD IMPRESSION."

It was surely a scene to excite some interest, if only the interest of curiosity, that was presented at Trevlyn Hold that night. Octave Chattaway in evening dress—for she had not begun to prepare for bed, although some time in her chamber—standing at the hall-door which she had opened; Miss Diana pressing forward from the back of the hall in a hastily assumed dressing-gown; Mr. Chattaway in a waistcoat; Cris in greater dishabille; and Mrs. Chattaway dressed as was Octave.

Rupert came in, coughing with the night air, and leaning on the arm of George Ryle. There was no light, except such as was afforded by a candle carried by Miss Trevlyn; but she stepped forward and lighted the lamp.

"Now then," said she. "What is all this?"

"It is this," returned the master of Trevlyn Hold: "that I make rules for the proper regulation of my household, and a beardless boy chooses to break them. I should think"—turning shortly upon Miss Diana—"that you are not the one to countenance that."

"No," said she; "when rules are made they must be kept. What is your defence, Rupert?"

Rupert had thrown himself upon a bench against the wall in utter weariness of mind and body. "I don't care to make any defence," said he, in his apathy, as he leaned his cheek upon his hand, and fixed his blue eyes on Miss Trevlyn; "I don't know that there's much defence to make. Mr. Chattaway orders me to be in by half-past ten. I was at George Ryle's last night, and I a little exceeded the time, getting here five minutes or so after it, so I was locked out. Cris let himself in with his latch key, but he would not let me in."

Miss Diana glanced at Cris, but she said nothing. Mr. Chattaway interrupted. George, erect, fearless, was standing opposite to the group, and it was to him that Mr. Chattaway turned.

"What I want to know is this—by what right *you* interfere, George Ryle?"

"I am not aware that I have interfered—except by giving Rupert my arm up the hill, and by asking you to admit him. No very unjustifiable interference, surely, Mr. Chattaway."

"But it is, sir. And I ask why you presume to do it?"

"Presume?" returned George, pausing after the word. But there was no answer to it, and he went on. "I saw Rupert to-night, accidentally, as he was coming from Blackstone. It was about nine o'clock. I was at my garden-gate. He appeared terribly tired, and wished to come into the house and rest. There he fell asleep. I awoke him in time, but he seemed to be too weary to get here himself, and I came with him to help him along. He walked slowly—painfully, I should say; and it made him later than he ought to have arrived. Will you be so good, Mr. Chattaway, as to explain what part of this interference was unjustifiable? I do not see that I could have done less."

"You will see that you do less for the future," growled Mr. Chattaway. "I will have no interference of yours between the Hold and Rupert Trevlyn."

"Oh, Mr. Chattaway, you may make yourself perfectly easy," returned George, some sarcasm in his tone. "Nothing could

be farther from my intention than to interfere in any way with you, or with the Hold, or with Rupert in connection with you and the Hold. But, as I told you this morning, until you show me any good and sufficient reason for the contrary, I shall certainly observe common courtesy to Rupert when he comes in my way."

"Nonsense!" interposed Miss Diana. "Who says you are not to show courtesy to Rupert, George? Do you?" she asked, wheeling sharply round on Chattaway.

"There's one thing requires explanation," said Mr. Chattaway, turning to Rupert, and drowning Miss Diana's voice. "How came you to stop at Blackstone till this time of night? Where had you been loitering?"

Rupert answered the questions mechanically, never lifting his head. "I didn't leave until late. Ford wanted to go home, and I had to stop. After that I sat down on the way and dropped asleep."

"Sat down on your way and dropped asleep!" echoed Miss Diana. "What made you do that?"

"I don't know. I had been tired all day. I had no bed, you hear, last night. I suppose I can go to mine now?" he added, rising. "I want it badly enough."

"You can go—for this time," assented the master of Trevlyn Hold. "But you will understand that it is the last night I shall suffer my rules to be set at naught. You shall be in to time, or you do not come in at all."

Rupert shook hands with George Ryle, spoke a general "Good night" to the rest collectively, and went towards the stairs. At the back of the hall, lingering there in her timidity, stood Mrs. Chattaway. "Good night, dear Aunt Edith," he whispered.

She gave no answer. She only laid her hand upon his as he passed, and so momentary was the action that it escaped unobserved, except by one pair of eyes—and those were Octave Chattaway's.

George was the next to go. Octave put out her hand to him. "Does Caroline come to the harvest-home?" she inquired.

"Yes, I think so. Good night."

"Good night," replied Octave, amiably. "I am glad you took care of Rupert."

"She's as false as her father," thought George, as he went down the avenue.

They were all dispersing. There was nothing now to remain up for. Chattaway was turning to the staircase, when Miss Diana stepped inside one of the sitting-rooms, carrying her candle with her, and beckoned to him.

"What do you want, Diana?" he asked, not in a pleasant tone, as he followed her in.

"Why did you shut out Rupert last night?"

"Because I chose to do it!"

"But suppose I chose that he should not be shut out?" returned Miss Diana.

"Then we shall split," angrily rejoined the master of Trevlyn Hold. "I say that half-past ten o'clock is quite late enough for Rupert to enter. He is younger than Cris; you and Edith say he is not strong; *is* it too early?"

Mr. Chattaway was right in this. It was a sufficiently late hour; and Miss Diana, after a pause, pronounced it to be so. "I shall talk to Rupert," she said. "There's no harm in his going to spend an hour or two with George Ryle, or with any other friend, but he must be home in good time."

"Just so; he must be home in good time," acquiesced Chattaway. "He shall be home by half-past ten. And the only way to insure that, is to lock him out at first when he transgresses. Therefore, Diana, I shall follow my own way in this, and I beg you will not interfere."

Miss Diana went up to Rupert's room. He had taken off his coat, and thrown himself on the bed, as if the fatigue of undressing were too much for him.

"What's that for?" asked Miss Diana, as she entered. "Is that the way you get into bed?"

Rupert rose and sat down on a chair. "Only coming upstairs seems to tire me," he said, in tones of apology. "I should not have lain a minute."

Miss Diana threw back her head a little, and looked at Rupert. The determined will of the Trevlyns shone out from every line of her face.

"I have come to ask where you slept last night. I mean to know it, Rupert."

"I don't mind your knowing it," replied Rupert; "I have told Aunt Edith. I decline to tell Chattaway, and I hope that no one else will tell him."

"Why?"

"Because he might lay blame where no blame is due. Chattaway turned me from the door, Aunt Diana, and Cris, who came

up just after, turned me from it also. I went down to the lodge, and got Ann Canham to let me in; and I lay part of the night on their hard settle, and part of the night I sat upon it. That's where I was. But if Chattaway knew it, he'd be turning old Canham and Ann from the lodge, as he turned me from the door."

"Oh no, he wouldn't," said Miss Diana, "if it were my pleasure to keep them in it. Do you feel ill, Rupert?"

"I feel middling. It is that I am tired, I suppose. I shall be all right in the morning."

Miss Diana descended to her own room. Inside, waiting for her, was Mrs. Chattaway. Mrs. Chattaway had a shawl thrown over her shoulders, and seemed to be shivering. She slipped the bolt of the door—what was she afraid of?—and turned to Miss Trevlyn, her hands clasped.

"Diana, this is killing me!" she wailed. "Why should Rupert be treated as he is? I know I am but a poor creature, that I have been one all my life—a very coward; but sometimes I think that I must speak out and protest against the injustice, though I should die in the effort."

"Why, what's the matter?" uttered Miss Diana, whose intense composure formed a strange contrast to her sister's agitated words and bearing.

"Oh, you know!—you know! I have not dared to speak out much, even to you, Diana; but it's killing me—it's killing me! Is it not enough that we despoiled Rupert of his inheritance, but we must also——"

"Be silent!" sharply interrupted Miss Diana, glancing around and lowering her voice to a whisper. "Will you never have done with that folly, Edith?"

"I shall never have done with its remembrance. I don't often speak of it; once, it may be, in seven years, not more. Better for me that I could speak of it; it would prey less upon my heart!"

"You have benefited by it as much as any one has."

"Yes: I cannot help myself. Heaven knows, that if I could retire to some poor hut, and live upon a crust, and benefit by it no more, I should do so—oh, how willingly! But there's no escape. I am hemmed in by its consequences; we are all hemmed in by them—and there's no escape."

Miss Diana looked at her. Steadfastly, keenly; not angrily, but searchingly and critically, as a doctor looks at a patient supposed to be afflicted with mania.

"If you do not take care, Edith, you will become insane upon this point, as I believe I have warned you before," she said, with calmness. "I am not sure but you are slightly touched now!"

"I do not think I am," replied poor Mrs. Chattaway, passing her hand over her brow. "I feel confused enough here sometimes, but there's no fear that madness will really come. If thinking could have turned me mad, I should have been mad years ago."

"The very act of your coming here in this state of excitement, when you should be going to your bed, and of saying what you do say, must be nothing less than a degree of madness."

"I would go to bed, if I could sleep," said Mrs. Chattaway. "I lie awake night after night, thinking of the past; of the present; thinking of Rupert and of what we did for him; thinking of the treatment we deal out to him now. I think of his father, poor Joe; I think of his mother, Emily Dean, whom we once so loved; and I—I cannot sleep, Diana!"

There really did seem something strange in Mrs. Chattaway to-night. For once in her life, Diana Trevlyn's heart beat a shade faster.

"Try and calm yourself, Edith," she said soothingly.

"I wish I could! I should be more calm if you and my husband would allow it. If you would only allow Rupert to be treated with common kindness——"

"He is not treated with unkindness," interrupted Miss Diana.

"It appears to me that he is treated with nothing but unkindness. He——"

"Is he beaten?—is he starved?"

"The system pursued towards him is altogether unkind," persisted Mrs. Chattaway. "Indulgences dealt out to our own children are denied to him. When I think that he might be the true master of Trevlyn Hold——"

"Edith, I will not listen to this," interrupted Miss Diana. "What has come to you to-night?"

A shiver passed over the frame of Mrs. Chattaway. She was sitting on a low toilette chair covered with white drapery, her head bent on her hand. By her reply, which she did not look up to give, it appeared that she took the question literally.

"I feel the pain more than usual; nothing else. I do feel it so sometimes."

"What pain?" asked Miss Diana.

"The pain of remorse: the pain of the wrong dealt out to Rupert. It seems to be greater than I can bear. Do you know," she added, raising her feverish eyes to Miss Diana, "that I scarcely closed my eyelids once last night? All the long night through I was thinking of Rupert. I fancied him lying outside on the damp grass; I fancied him——"

"Stop a minute, Edith. Are you seeking to blame your husband to me?"

"No, no; I don't blame him—I don't wish to blame any one. But I wish it could be altered."

"If Rupert knows the hour for coming in—and it is not an unreasonable hour—it is he who is to blame if he exceeds it."

Mrs. Chattaway could not gainsay this. In point of fact, though she found that things were grievously uncomfortable, wrong altogether, she had not the strength of mind to say *where* the system was deficient, or how it should be altered. On this fresh agitation, the coming in at half-past ten at night, she could only judge as a vacillating woman. The hour, as Miss Diana said, was not an unreasonable one, and Mrs. Chattaway would have fallen in with it with all her heart, and approved her husband's judgment in making it, if Rupert had only obeyed the mandate. If Rupert did not obey it—if he somewhat exceeded its bounds—she would have liked that the door should still be open to him, and no scolding given. It was the discomfort that worried her; it was mixing itself up with the old feeling of the wrong done to Rupert, rendering things, as she aptly expressed it, more miserable than she could bear.

"I'll talk to Rupert to-morrow morning," said Miss Diana. "I shall add my authority to Chattaway's, and tell him that he *must* be in."

It may be that a shadow of the future was casting itself over the mind of Mrs. Chattaway, dimly and vaguely pointing to the terrible events hereafter to arise—events which would throw their consequences on the remainder of Rupert's life, and which had their origin in this new and ill-omened order, touching his coming home at night.

"Edith," said Miss Diana, "I would recommend you to get less sensitive on the subject of Rupert. It is growing with you into a morbid feeling."

"I wish I could! It does grow upon me. Do you know," she added, sinking her voice and looking feverishly at her

sister, "that old impression has come again! I thought it had worn itself out. I thought it might have left me for ever."

Miss Diana almost lost her patience. Her own mind was a very contrast to her sister's; the two were as widely opposite in their organization as the poles. Fanciful, dreamy, vacillating, weak, the one; the other strong, practical, matter-of-fact.

"I don't know what you mean by the 'old impression,'" she rejoined, with a contempt she did not seek to disguise. "Is it not some new folly?"

"I have told you of it in the old days, Diana. I used to feel certain—certain—that the wrong we inflicted on Rupert would avenge itself—that in some way he would come into his inheritance, and we should be despoiled of it. I felt so certain of it, that every morning of my life when I got up I seemed to look for its fulfilment before the day closed. But the time went on and on, and it never was fulfilled. It went on so long that the impression wore itself out of my mind, and I ceased to expect it. But now it has come again. It is stronger than ever. For some weeks past it has been growing more present with me day by day, and I cannot shake it off."

"The best thing you can do now is to go to bed, and try and sleep off your folly," cried Miss Trevlyn, with the stinging contempt she allowed herself at rare times to show to her sister. "I feel more provoked with you, Edith, than I can express. A child might be pardoned for indulging in such absurdities of mind; a woman, never!"

Mrs. Chattaway rose. "I'll go to bed," she meekly answered, "and get what sleep I can. I remember that you cast ridicule on this feeling of mine in the old days——"

"Pray did anything come of it then?" interrupted Miss Diana, sarcastically.

"I have said it did not. And the impression left me. But it has come again now. Good night, Diana."

"Good night, and a more sensible frame of mind to you!" was the retort of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

Mrs. Chattaway crept softly along the corridor to her own dressing-room. She was in hopes that her husband by that time was in bed and asleep. What was her surprise, then, to see him sitting at the table when she entered, not undressed, and as wide awake as she was.

"You have business with Diana late," he remarked.

Mrs. Chattaway felt wholly and entirely subdued; she had felt so since the previous night, when Rupert was denied

admittance. The painful timidity, clinging to her always, seemed partially to have left her for a time. It was as though she had not the strength left to be shy; almost as Rupert felt in his weariness of body, she was past caring for anything in her utter weariness of mind. Otherwise, she might not have spoken to Miss Diana as she had just done: most certainly she could never have spoken as she was about to speak to Mr. Chattaway.

"What may your business with her have been?" he resumed.

"It was not much, James," she answered. "I was saying how ill I felt."

"Ill! With what?"

"Ill in mind, I think," said Mrs. Chattaway, putting her hand to her brow. "I was telling her that the old fear had come upon me; the impression that used to cling to me always that some change was at hand regarding Rupert. I lost it for a great many years, but it has come again."

"Try and speak lucidly, if you can," was Mr. Chattaway's answer. "What has come again?"

"It seems to have come upon me in the light of a warning," she resumed, so lucidly that Mr. Chattaway, had he been a few steps lower in social grade, might have felt inclined to beat her. "I have ever felt that Rupert would in some manner regain his rights—I mean what he was deprived of," she hastily added, in deprecation of the word "rights," which had slipped from her. "That he will regain Trevlyn Hold, and we shall lose it."

Mr. Chattaway listened in consternation, his mouth gradually opening in his bewilderment. "What makes you think that?" he asked, when he had found his speech.

"I don't exactly *think* it, James. Think is not the right word. The feeling has come upon me again within the last few weeks, and I cannot shake it off. I believe it to be a presentiment; a warning."

Paler and paler grew Mr. Chattaway. He did not understand. Like Miss Diana Trevlyn, he was very matter-of-fact, comprehending nothing but what could be seen and felt; and his wife might as well have spoken to him in an unknown tongue as of "presentiments." He drew a rapid conclusion that some unpleasant fact, bearing upon the dread which *he* had long felt, must have come to his wife's knowledge.

"What have you heard?" he gasped.

"I have heard nothing; nothing whatever. I——"

"Then what on earth are you talking about?"

"Did you understand me, James? I say that the impression was once firmly seated in my mind that Rupert would somehow be restored to what—to what"—she scarcely knew how to frame her words with the delicacy she deemed due to her husband's feelings—"to what would have been his but for his father's death. And that impression has now returned to me."

"But you have not heard anything? Any plot?—any conspiracy that's being hatched against us?" he reiterated.

"No, no."

Mr. Chattaway stared searchingly at his wife. Did he fancy, as Miss Diana had done, that her intellects were becoming disordered?

"Then, what do you mean?" he asked, after a pause. "Why should such an idea arise?"

Mrs. Chattaway was silent. She could not tell him the truth; could not say that she believed it was the constant dwelling upon the wrong and injustice, which had first suggested the notion that the wrong would inevitably recoil on its workers. They had broken alike the laws of God and man; and those who do so cannot be sure in this world of immunity from punishment. That they had so long enjoyed unmolested the inheritance gained by fraud, gave no certainty that they would enjoy it to the end. She felt it, if her husband and Diana Trevlyn did not. Too often there were certain verses of Holy Writ spelling out their syllables upon her brain. "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."

All this she could not say to Mr. Chattaway. She could give him no good reason for what she had said; he did not understand imaginative fancies, and he went to rest after bestowing upon her a sharp lecture for indulging in them.

Nevertheless, in spite of her denial, the master of Trevlyn Hold could not divest himself of the impression that she must have picked up some scrap of news, or heard a word dropped in some quarter, which had led her to say what she did. And it gave him terrible discomfort.

Was the haunting shadow, the dread lying latent in his heart, about to be changed into substance? He lay on his bed, turning uneasily from side to side until morning, wondering from what quarter the first glimmer of the mischief would come,

CHAPTER XIX.

A FIT OF AMIABILITY IN CRIS.

RUPERT came down to breakfast the next morning. He was cold, sick, shivery; little better than he had felt the previous night; his chest was sore, his breathing painful. A good fire burnt in the grate of the breakfast-room—Miss Diana was a friend to fires, and caused them to be lighted as soon as the heat of summer had passed—and Rupert bent over it. He cared for it more than for food; and yet it was no doubt having gone without food the previous day which was causing the sensation of sickness within him now.

Miss Diana glided in, erect and majestic. "How are you this morning?" she asked of Rupert.

"Pretty well," he answered, as he warmed his thin white hands over the blaze. "I have the old pain here a bit"—touching his chest. "It will go off by-and-by, I dare say."

Miss Diana had her eyes riveted on him. The extreme delicacy of his countenance—its lines of fading health—struck upon her greatly. Was he looking worse? or was it that her absence from home for three weeks had caused her to notice it more than she had done when seeing him daily? She asked herself the question, and she could not decide.

"You don't look very well, Rupert."

"Don't I? I have not felt well for this week or two. I think the walking to Blackstone and back is too much for me."

"You must have a pony," she continued, after a pause.

"Ah! that would be a help to me," he said, his countenance brightening. "I might get on better with what I have to do when there. Mr. Chattaway grumbles, and grumbles, but I declare to you, Aunt Diana, that I do my best. The walk there seems to take away all my energy, and, by the time I sit down, I am unfit for work."

Miss Diana went nearer to him, and spoke in a lower tone. What was the reason that you disobeyed Mr. Chattaway with regard to coming in?"

"I did not do it intentionally," he replied. "The time slipped on, and it got late without my noticing it. I think I told you so last night, Aunt Diana.'

"Very well. It must not occur again," she said, peremptorily and significantly. "If you are locked out in future, I shall not interfere."

Mr. Chattaway came in, settling himself into his coat, with a discontented gesture and a blue face. He was none the better for his sleepless night, and the torment which had caused it. Rupert drew away from the fire, leaving the field clear for him: as a schoolboy does at the entrance of his master.

"Don't let us have this trouble with you repeated," he roughly said to Rupert. "As soon as you have breakfasted, you make the best of your way to Blackstone: and don't lag on the road."

"Rupert's not going to Blackstone to-day," said Miss Diana.

Mr. Chattaway turned upon her: no very pleasant expression on his countenance. "What's that for?"

"I shall keep him at home for a week," she said, "and let him be nursed. After that, I dare say he'll be stronger, and can attend better to his duty in all ways."

Mr. Chattaway could willingly have braved Miss Diana, if he had only dared. But he did not dare. He strode to the breakfast-table and took his seat, leaving those who liked to follow him.

It has been remarked that there was a latent antagonism ever at work in the hearts of George Ryle and Octave Chattaway; and there was certainly ever constant and visible antagonism between the actions of Mr. Chattaway and Miss Diana Trevlyn, as far as they related to the ruling economy of Trevlyn Hold. She had the open-heartedness of the Trevlyns—he, the miserly selfishness of the Chattaways. She was liberal on the estate and in the household—he would have been niggardly to a degree. Miss Diana, however, was the one to reign paramount, and he was angered every hour of his life by seeing some extravagance—as he deemed it—which might have been avoided. He could indemnify himself at the mines; and there he did as he pleased.

Breakfast over, Mr. Chattaway went out. Cris went out. Rupert, as the day grew warm and bright, strolled into the garden, and basked on the bench there in the sun. He very much enjoyed these days of idleness. To sit as he was doing now, feeling that no exertion whatever was required of him; that he might stay where he was for the whole day, and gaze up at the blue sky as he fell into thought; or watch the light fleecy clouds that rose above the horizon, and form them into

groups of many fantastic things—constituted one of the pleasures of Rupert Trevlyn's life. Not for the bright blue of the sky, not for the ever-changing clouds, not even for the warm sunshine and the balmy air—it was not for all these he cared, but for the *rest*. The delightful consciousness that he might be as still as he pleased; that no Blackstone or any other far-off place would demand him; that for a whole day he might be at rest—there lay the charm. Nothing could possibly have been more suggestive of his want of strength—as any one might have guessed possessed of sufficient penetration.

No. Mr. Chattaway need not have feared that Rupert was hatching plots against him, whenever he was out of his sight. Had poor Rupert possessed the desire, he lacked the energy.

The dinner hour at Trevlyn Hold, nominally early, was frequently regulated by the will or the movements of the master. When he said he could only be home at a given hour—three, four, five, six, as the case might be—then the cook had her orders accordingly. It was fixed on this day for four o'clock. At two (the more ordinary hour for it) Cris came in.

Strictly speaking, it was ten minutes past two, and Cris burst into the dining-room with a heated face, afraid lest he should come in for the end of the meal. Whatever might be the hour fixed, the dinner was required to be on the table to the minute; and it generally was so. Miss Diana was an exacting mistress. Cris burst in, hair untidy, hands unwashed, desperately afraid of losing his share.

A long face drew he. Not a soul was in the room, and the dining-table showed its bright mahogany, nothing upon it. Cris pulled the bell.

"What time do we dine to-day?" he asked sharply of the servant who answered it.

"At four, sir."

"What a nuisance! And I am as hungry as a hunter. Get me something to eat. Here—stop!—where are they all?"

"Madam's at home, sir; and I think Miss Octave's at home. The rest are out."

Cris muttered something which was not heard, which perhaps he did not intend should be heard; and when his luncheon was brought in, he sat down to it with great satisfaction. After he had finished, he went to the stables, and by-and-by came in to find his sister.

"I say, Octave, I want to take you for a drive. Will you go?"

The unwonted attention on her brother's part quite astonished Octave. Before now she had asked him to drive her out, and been met with a rough refusal. Cris was of that class of young gentlemen who see no good in overpowering their sisters with attention.

"Get your things on at once," said Cris.

Octave felt dubious. She was writing letters to some particular friends with whom she kept up a correspondence, and did not much care to be interrupted.

"Where is it to go, Cris?"

"Anywhere. We can drive through Barmester, and so home by the cross-roads. Or we'll go down the lower road to Barbrook, and go on to Barmester that way."

The suggestion did not offer sufficient attraction to Octave. "No," said she; "I am busy, Cris, and shall not go out this afternoon. I don't care to drive out when there's nothing to go for."

"You may as well come. It isn't often I ask you."

"No, that it is not," returned Octave, with emphasis. "You have some particular motive in asking me to go now, I know. What is it, Cris?"

"I want to try my new horse. They say he'll go beautifully in harness."

"What! that handsome horse you took a fancy to the other day?—that papa said you should not buy?"

Cris nodded. "They let me have him for forty-five pounds."

"Where did you get the money?" wondered Octave.

"Never you mind. I have paid ten pounds down, and they'll wait for the rest. Will you come?"

"No," said Octave. "I shan't go out to-day."

The refusal perhaps was somewhat softened by the dashing up to the door of the dog-cart with the new purchase in it; and Cris ran out. A handsome animal certainly, but apparently a remarkably restive one. Mrs. Chattaway came through the hall, dressed for walking. Cris seized upon her.

"Mother dear, you'll go for a drive with me," cried he, caressingly. "Octave won't—an ill-natured thing!"

It was so unusual a circumstance to find herself made much of by her son, spoken to affectionately, that Mrs. Chattaway, in very surprise and gratitude, ascended the dog-cart forthwith. "I am glad to accompany you, dear," she softly said. "I was only going to walk in the garden."

But before Cris had gathered the reins in his hand and

taken his place beside her, George Ryle came up, and somewhat hindered the departure.

"I have been to Barmester to see Caroline this morning, Mrs. Chattaway, and have brought you a message from Amelia," he said, keeping his hold on the dog-cart as he spoke—as much as he could do so, for the prancing horse.

"That she wants to come home, I suppose?" said Mrs. Chattaway, smiling.

"The message I was charged with was, that she *would* come home," he said, smiling in answer. "The fact is, Caroline is coming home for a few days: and Amelia thinks she will be cruelly used, unless she is allowed the holiday also."

"Caroline is coming to the harvest-home?"

"Yes. I told Amelia——"

Holding on any longer became impossible; and George drew back, and took a critical survey of the new horse. "Why, it is the horse Allen has had for sale!" he exclaimed. "What brings him here, Cris?"

"I have bought him," shortly answered Cris.

"Have you? Mrs. Chattaway, I would not advise you to venture out behind that horse. I do not think he has been broken in for harness."

"He has," returned Cris. "You mind your own business. Do you think I should drive him if he were not safe? He's only skittish. I understand horses, I hope, as well as you do."

George turned to Mrs. Chattaway. "Do not go with him," he urged. "Let Cris try him first alone."

"I am not afraid, George," she said, in loving accents. "It is not often Cris finds time to drive me. Thank you all the same."

Cris gave the horse its head, and the animal dashed off. George stood watching until a turn in the avenue hid them from view, and then gave utterance to an involuntary exclamation—

"Cris has no right to risk the life of his mother."

Not very long afterwards, the skittish horse was flying along the road, with nothing of the dog-cart left behind him, except its shafts.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INVASION AT THE PARSONAGE.

On the lower road, leading from Trevlyn Farm to Barbrook, was situated Barbrook Rectory. A pretty house, covered with ivy, standing in the midst of a productive garden, and surrounded by green fields. An exceedingly pretty place for its size, that parsonage—it was never styled anything else—but very small. A good thing that the parsons inhabiting it had none of them owned large families, or they would have been at fault for room.

The present occupant was the Reverend John Freeman. Occupant of the parsonage house, you understand; not incumbent of the living. The living was in the gift of a neighbouring cathedral; it was held by one of the chapter; and he delegated his charge (beyond an occasional sermon) to a curate. It had been so in the old time when Squire Trevlyn flourished, and it was so still. Whispers were abroad that when the death of this canon should take place—a very old man, both as to his years and his occupancy of his prebendal stall—changes would be made, and the next incumbent would have to reside on the living. But this has nothing to do with us, and I don't know why I mentioned it.

Mr. Freeman had been curate of the place for more than twenty years. He succeeded the Reverend Shafto Dean, of whom you have heard. Mr. Dean had remained at Barbrook only a very short time after his sister's marriage to Joe Trevlyn. That event had not tended to allay the irritation existing between Trevlyn Hold and the parsonage, and on some promotion being offered to Mr. Dean, he embraced it. The promotion given him was in the West Indies: he would not have chosen a residence there under happier auspices; but he felt sick of the ceaseless contention with Squire Trevlyn. Mr. Dean went out to the West Indies, and died of fever within six months of his arrival. Mr. Freeman had succeeded him at Barbrook, and Mr. Freeman was there still: a married man, without children.

The parsonage household was very modest. One servant only was kept; and if you have the pleasure of making both ends to meet at the end of the year upon the moderate sum of

one hundred pounds sterling, you will wonder how even that servant could be retained. But a clergyman has advantages in some points over the rest of the world: at least, this one had; his house being rent-free, and his garden supplying more vegetables and fruit than his household could consume. Some of the choicer fruit, indeed, he sold: and I hope you won't think any the worse of him for doing so. His superfluous vegetables he gave away; and many and many a cabbage leaf full of gooseberries and currants did the little parish children look out for, and receive. He was a quiet, pleasant little man of fifty, with a fair face and a fat double chin. Never an ill word had he had with any one in the parish since he came into it. His wife was pleasant, too, and talkative; and would as soon be caught by visitors making puddings in the kitchen, or shelling the peas for dinner, as sitting in state, waiting for company.

At the back of the parsonage house, detached from it, was a room called the brewhouse, where sundry abnormal duties, quite out of the regular routine of things, were performed. A boiler was in one corner, a large board or table which would put up or let down at will was underneath the casement, and the floor was flagged. On the morning of the day when Mr. Cris Chattaway contrived to separate his dog-cart from its shafts, or to let his new horse do it for him, of which you will hear more presently, this brewhouse was so filled with steam that you could not see across it. A tall, strong, rosy-faced woman, looking about thirty years of age, was standing over a washing-tub, rubbing away; and in the boiler, bubbling and seething, the white linen heaved up and down like the waves of a small sea.

You have seen the woman before, though the chances are that you have forgotten all about her. It is Molly, who once lived at Trevlyn Farm. Some five years ago she came to an issue with the ruling potentates, Mrs. Ryle and Nora, and the result was a parting. Since then Molly had been living at the parsonage, and had grown to be valued by her master and mistress. She looks taller than ever, but you see she has pattens on, to keep her feet off the wet flags. Indeed, it was much the fashion in that neighbourhood for the maid-servant to go about in pattens, let the flags be wet or dry.

Molly was rubbing vigorously at her master's surplice—which shared the benefits of the wash with more ignoble things, when the church-clock striking out caused her to pause, and

glance up through the open window. She was counting the strokes.

"Twelve o'clock, as I'm alive! I knew it must have gone eleven, though I hadn't heard it strike; but I never thought it was twelve yet! And nothing out but a handful o' coloured things and the flannels! If missis was at home, she'd say I'd been wasting all my morning, gossiping."

An accusation which Mrs. Freeman might have made with great truth. There was not a more inveterate gossip than Molly in the parish: and her propensity had lost her her last place.

She turned to the boiler, seized the rolling-pin, and poked down the rising clothes with a fierceness which seemed to wish to make up for the lost hours. Then she dashed open the little iron door underneath, threw on a shovel of coals, and shut it again.

"This surplice is wearing as thin as anything in front," soliloquized she, recommencing her work at the tub. "I'd better not rub it too much. But it's just in the very place where master gets 'em most dirty. If I were missis, I should line 'em in front. His other one's going worse than this. They must cost a smart penny, these surplices: the linen is—— Now, who's that?"

Molly's interjection was caused by a flourishing knock at the front-door. It did not please her. She was too busy to answer useless visitors; useless because her master and mistress were out.

"I won't go to the door," decided she, in her vexation. "Let 'em knock again, or go away."

The applicant preferred the former course, for a second knock, louder than the first, sent its echoes through the house. Molly brought her wet arms out of the water, gave them a rub upon a towel, and then went on her way grumbling.

"It's that bothering Mother Hurnall, I know! And ten to one but she'll walk in, under pretence of resting, and poke her nose into my brewhouse, and see how my work's getting on. She's an interfering, mischief-making old toad, and if she *does* come in, I'll——"

Molly had opened the door, and her words came to an abrupt conclusion. Instead of the meddlesome lady she had expected to see, there stood a gentleman; a stranger: a tall, oldish man, with a white beard and white whiskers, jet-black eyes, a kindly but firm expression on his sallow face, a

carpet-bag in one hand, and a large red umbrella in the other.

Molly dropped a curtsey, but a dubious one. Beards were not much in fashion in that simple country place, neither were red umbrellas, and her opinion vacillated. Was the gentleman before her some venerable, much-to-be-respected patriarch; or was he one of those conjurors that went about to fairs in a caravan? Molly had had the gratification of seeing the one perform who came to the last fair, and he wore a white beard.

"I have been directed to this house as being the residence of the Reverend Mr. Freeman," began the stranger. "Is he at home?"

"No, sir, he's not," replied Molly, dropping another and a more assured curtsey. There was something about the stranger's voice, his straightforward glance, which insensibly quieted her fears. "My master and mistress are both gone out for the day, and won't be home till night."

This appeared to be a poser to the stranger. He looked at Molly, and Molly looked at him. "It is very unfortunate," he said at length. "I came—I have come a great many hundred miles, and I reckoned very much upon seeing my old friend Freeman. I shall be going away again from England in a few days."

Molly had opened her eyes. "Come a great many hundred miles, all to see master!" she exclaimed.

"Not to see him," answered the stranger, with a half-smile at Molly's simplicity—not that he looked like a smiling man in general, but a very sad one. "I had to come to England on business, and I travelled a long way to get here, and shall have to travel the same long way to get back again. I have come down from London on purpose to see Mr. Freeman. It is many years since we met, and I thought, if quite agreeable, I would sleep a couple of nights here. Did you ever happen to hear him mention an old friend of his, named Daw?"

The name struck on Molly's memory: it was a somewhat peculiar one. "Well, yes, I have, sir," she answered. "I have heard him speak of a Mr. Daw to my mistress. I think —I think," she added, putting her fingers to her temple in consideration, "that he lived somewhere over in France, that Mr. Daw. I think he was a clergyman. My master lighted upon a lady's death a short time ago in the paper, while I was in the parlour helping my missis line some bed-furniture, and he exclaimed and said it must be Mr. Daw's wife."

"Right—right in all," said the gentleman. "I am Mr. Daw."

He took a small card-case from his pocket, and held out one of its cards to Molly; deeming it well, no doubt, that the woman should be convinced he was really the person he professed to be. "I can see but one thing to do," he said, "you must give me house-room until Mr. Freeman comes home this evening."

"You are welcome, sir. But my goodness! there's nothing in the house for dinner, and I'm in the midst of a big wash."

He shook his head as he walked into the parlour—a sunny apartment, redolent of the scent of mignonette, boxes of which grew outside the windows. "I don't care at all for dinner," he carelessly observed. "A crust of bread and a little fresh butter, with a cup of milk, if you happen to have it, will do as well for me as dinner."

Molly left him, to see what she could do in the way of entertainment, and to take counsel with herself. "If it doesn't happen on purpose!" she ejaculated. "Anything that upsets the order of the house is sure to come on washing day! Well, there! it's of no good worrying. The wash must go, that's all. If I can't finish to-day, I must finish to-morrow. Bother! There'll be the trouble and expense of lighting the furnace over again! I think he's what he says he is. I've heard them red umberellas is used in France."

She carried in a tray of refreshment—bread, butter, cheese, milk, and honey. She had pulled down the sleeves of her gown, and straightened her hair, and put on a clean apron, and taken off her pattens. Mr. Daw detained her while he helped himself, asking divers questions; and Molly, nothing loth, ever ready for a gossip, remembered not her exacting brewhouse of work.

"There is a place called Trevlyn Hold in this neighbourhood, is there not?"

"Right over there, sir," replied Molly, extending her hand in a slanting direction from the window. "You might see its chimblies but for them trees."

"I suppose the young master of Trevlyn has grown to be a fine man?"

Molly turned up her nose. She never supposed but the question alluded to Cris, and Cris was no favourite of hers. She had imbibed the prejudice, possibly, during her service at Trevlyn Farm.

"*I* don't call him so," said she, shortly. "A weazened-face fellow, with an odd look in his eyes as good as a squint! He's not much liked about here, sir."

"Indeed! That's a pity. Is he married? I suppose not though, yet. He is young."

"There's many a one gets married younger than he is. But I don't know who'd have him," added Molly, in her prejudice. "*I* wouldn't, if I was a young lady."

"Who has acted as his guardian?" resumed Mr. Daw.

Molly scarcely understood the question. "A guardian, sir? That's somebody that takes care of a child's money, who has no parents, isn't it? *He* has no guardian that I ever heard of, except it's his father."

Mr. Daw laid down his knife. "The young master of Trevlyn has no father," he exclaimed.

"But indeed he has," returned Molly. "What should hinder his having one?"

"My good woman, you cannot know what I am talking of. His father died years and years ago. I was at his funeral."

Molly opened her mouth in very astonishment. "His father is alive now, sir, at any rate," cried she, after a pause. "I saw him ride by this house only yesterday."

They stared at each other, as people at cross-purposes often do. "Of whom are you speaking?" asked Mr. Daw, at length.

"Of Cris Chattaway, sir. You asked me about the young master of Trevlyn Hold. Cris will be its master after his father. Old Chattaway's its master now."

"Chattaway? Chattaway?" repeated the stranger to himself, as if recalling the name. "I remember. It was he who—— Is Rupert Trevlyn dead?" he hastily asked.

"Oh no, sir."

"Why, then, is he not the master of Trevlyn Hold?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Molly, after some consideration. "I suppose because Chattaway is."

"But surely Rupert Trevlyn inherited it on the death of his grandfather, Squire Trevlyn?"

"No, he didn't inherit it, sir. It was Chattaway."

So interested in the argument had the visitor become, that he neglected his plate, and was looking at Molly with astonished eyes. "Why did he not inherit it? He was the heir."

"It's what folks can't rightly make out," answered the woman. "Chattaway came in for it, that's certain. But folks have never called him the Squire, though he's as sick as a dog for it."

"Who is Mr. Chattaway? What is his connection with the Trevlyns? I forget."

"His wife was Miss Edith Trevlyn, the Squire's daughter. There was but three of 'em,—Mrs. Ryle, and her, and Miss Diana. Miss Diana was never married, and I suppose won't be now."

"Miss Diana?—Miss Diana? Yes, yes, I recollect," repeated the stranger. "It was Miss Diana whom Mrs. Trevlyn—— Does Rupert Trevlyn live with Miss Diana?" he broke off again.

"Yes, sir; they all live at the Hold. The Chattaways, and Miss Diana, and young Mr. Rupert. Miss Diana has been out on a visit these two or three weeks past, but I heard this morning that she had come home."

"There was a pretty little girl—Maude—a year older than her brother," proceeded the questioner. "Where is she?"

"She's at the Hold, too, sir. They were brought to the Hold quite little babies, those two, and they have lived at it ever since, except when they've been at school. Miss Maude's governess to Chattaway's children."

Mr. Daw looked at Molly doubtingly. "Governess to Chattaway's children?" he mechanically repeated.

Molly nodded. She was growing quite at home with her guest; quite familiar. "Miss Maude has had the best of edications, they say: plays and sings first-rate; and so they made her the governess."

"But has she no fortune—no income?" reiterated the stranger, lost in wonder.

"Not a penny-piece," returned Molly, decisively. "Her and Mr. Rupert haven't a halfpenny between 'em of their own. He's clerk, or something of that sort, at Chattaway's coal mine, down yonder."

"But they were the heirs to the estate," the stranger persisted. "Their father was the son and heir of Squire Trevlyn, and they are his children! How is it? How can it be?"

The words were spoken in the light of a remark. Mr. Daw was evidently debating the question with himself. Molly thought the question was put to her.

"I don't know the rights of it, sir," was all she could answer. "All I can tell you is, that the Chattaways have come in for it, and the inheritance is theirs. But there's many a one round about here calls Mr. Rupert the heir to this day, and will call him so, in spite of Chattaway."

"He is the heir—he is the heir!" reiterated Mr. Daw. "I can prove——"

Again came that break in his discourse which had occurred before. Molly resumed—

"Master will be able to tell you better than me, sir, why the property should have went from Master Rupert to Chattaway. It was him that buried the old Squire, sir, and he was at the Hold after, and heard the Squire's will read. Nora told me once that he, the parson, cried shame upon it when he come away. But she was in a passion with Chattaway when she said it, so perhaps it wasn't true. I asked my missis about it one day that we was folding clothes together, but she said she knew nothing about it. She wasn't married then."

"Who is Nora?" inquired Mr. Daw.

"She's the housekeeper and manager at Trevlyn Farm; a sort of relation to 'em. It was where I lived before I come here, sir; four year, turned, I was at that one place. I have always been one to keep my places a good while," added Molly, with pride.

Apparently the boast was lost upon him; he did not seem to hear it. "Not the heir to Trevlyn!" he muttered; "not the heir to Trevlyn! It's a puzzle to me."

"I'm sorry master's out," repeated Molly, with sympathy. "But you can hear all about it to-night. They'll be home by seven o'clock. Twice a year, or thereabouts, they both go over to stop a day with missis's sister. Large millers they be, fourteen mile off, and live in a great big handsome house, and keep three or four indoor servants. The name's Whittaker, sir."

Mr. Daw did not show himself very much interested in the name, or in the worthy millers themselves. He was lost in a reverie. Molly made a movement about the plates and cheese and butter; she insinuated the glass of milk under his very nose. All in vain.

"Not the heir!" he reiterated again; "not the heir! And I have been picturing him in my mind as the heir all through these long years!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRANGER WITH THE RED UMBRELLA.

When Mrs. Chattaway and Cris drove off in the dog-cart, George Ryle did not follow them down the avenue, but turned to pursue his way round the house, which would take him to the fields, a shorter cut to his own land than if he took the road. For a long time after his father's death, George could not bear to go through the field which had been so fatal to him; but he lived down the feeling by the aid of that great reconciler to all things—Time.

Happening to cast his eyes on the ornamental grounds as he skirted them, which lay on this side of the Hold, he saw Rupert Trevlyn. Leaping a dwarf hedge of azaroles, he hastened to him.

"Well, old fellow! Taking a nap?"

Rupert opened his half-closed eyes, and looked round with alacrity. "I thought it was Cris again!" he exclaimed. "He was here just now."

"Cris has gone out with his mother in the dog-cart. I don't like the horse he is driving her with, though."

"Is it that new horse he has been getting?"

"Yes; the one Allen has had to sell."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Rupert. "I saw it carrying Allen one day, and thought it a beautiful animal!"

"It has a vicious temper, as I have been given to understand. And I believe it has never been properly broken-in for harness. How do you feel to-day, Rupert?"

"No great shakes. I wish I was as strong as you, George."

George laughed pleasantly; and his voice, when he spoke, had a soothing sound in it. "So you may be, by the time you are as old as I am. Why, you have hardly done growing yet, Rupert. There's plenty of time for you to get strong."

"What brings you up here, George? Anything particular?"

"I saw Amelia to-day, and brought a message from her to her mamma. Caroline is coming home for the harvest-home, and Amelia wants to come too."

"Oh, they'll let her," cried Rupert. "The girls can do just as they like."

He, Rupert, leaned his chin on his hand, and began thinking

of Amelia Chattaway. She was the oldest of the three younger children, and was at first under the tuition of Maude. But Maude could do nothing with her, the young lady liking to be master and mistress; in fact, she was too old both for Maude's control and her instruction, and it was deemed well to place her at a good school at Barmester, the school at which Caroline Ryle was being educated. Somehow Rupert's comforts were never added to by the presence of Amelia in the house, and he might have given way to a hope that she would not come home, if he had been of a disposition to encourage such feelings.

Octave, who had discerned George Ryle from the windows of the Hold, came out to them, her pink parasol shading her face from the sun. A short while, and Miss Trevlyn came home and joined them; next came Maude and her charges. It was quite a merry gathering. Miss Trevlyn unbent from her coldness, as she could do sometimes; Octave was all smiles and suavity, and every one, except Rupert, seemed at ease. Altogether, George Ryle was beguiled into doing what could not be often charged upon him—spending a good part of an afternoon in idleness.

But he went away at last. And as he was turning into the first field—never called anything but "the Bull field," by the country people, from the hour of Mr. Ryle's accident—he encountered Jim Sanders, eager and breathless.

"What's the matter?" asked George. "What do you want here?"

"I was a-speeding up to the Hold to tell 'em, sir. There have been an accident with Mr. Cris's dog-cart. I thought I'd warn the men up at his place."

"What accident?" hastily asked George, mentally beholding one sole object, and that was Mrs. Chattaway.

"I don't know yet, sir, what it is. I was in the road by the gate, when a horse came tearing along with some broken shafts after it. It was that horse of Allen's which I see Mr. Cris a-driving out an hour ago in his dog-cart, and Madam along of him. So I cut across the fields at once."

"You can go on," said George; "some of the men will be about. Should you see Miss Diana, or any of the young ladies, take care that you say nothing to them. Do you hear?"

"I'll mind, sir."

Jim Sanders hastened out of the field on his way to the back premises of the Hold, and George flew onwards. When he gained the road, he looked up and down, but could see no

traces of the accident. Nothing was in sight. Which way should he turn? Where had it occurred? He began reproaching himself for not asking Mr. Jim Sanders which way the horse had been coming from. As he halted in indecision, some one suddenly came round the turning of the road lower down. It was Mr. Cris Chattaway, with a rueful expression of countenance, and a gig-whip in his hand.

George made but few strides towards him. "What is the worst, Cris? Let me know it."

"I'll have him taken in charge and prosecuted, as sure as a gun," raved Cris. "I will. It's infamous that these things should be allowed in the public road."

"What—the horse?" exclaimed George.

"Horse be hanged!" politely returned Cris, whose irritation was excessive. "It wasn't the horse's fault. Nothing could go steadier and better than he went all the way and back again, as far as this——"

"Where's Mrs. Chattaway?" interrupted George.

"On the bank, down there. She's all right; only shaken a bit. The fellow's name was on the thing, and I have copied it down, and I've sent a man off for a constable. I'll teach him that he can't go about the country, plying his trade and frightening gentlemen's horses with impunity."

In spite of Cris's incoherence and passion, George contrived to gather an inkling of the facts. They had taken a short, easy drive down the lower road and through Barbrook, the horse going (according to Cris) beautifully. But on the road home, in that lonely part between the Hold and Trevlyn Farm, there stood a razor-grinder with his machine, grinding a knife. Whether the whirr of the wheel did not please the horse; whether it was the aspect of the machine; or whether it might be the razor-grinder himself, a somewhat tattered object in a fur cap, the animal no sooner came near, than he began his favourite dance on the hind legs and backed towards the ditch. Cris did his best. He was a good whip, and a fearless one; but he could not conquer. The horse turned Mrs. Chattaway into the ditch, relieved his mind by a few kicks, and started off with part of the shafts behind him.

"Are you much hurt, dear Mrs. Chattaway?" asked George, tenderly, as he bent over her.

She looked up with a smile, but her face was of a death-like whiteness. Fortunately, the ditch, a wide ditch, was dry; and she sat on the sloping bank, her feet resting in it. The

dog-cart lay near, and several gazers, chiefly labouring men, stood around, staring helplessly. The razor-grinder was protesting *his* immunity from blame, and the hapless machine remained in its place untouched, drawn close to the pathway on the opposite side of the road.

"You need not look at me so anxiously, George," Mrs. Chattaway replied, the smile still on her face. "I don't believe I am hurt. One of my elbows is smarting, but I really feel no pain anywhere. I am shaken, of course; but that's not much. I wish I had taken your advice, not to sit behind that horse."

"Cris says he went beautifully, until he was frightened."

"Did Cris say so? It appeared to me that he had trouble with him all the way; but Cris knows, of course. He has gone to the Hold to bring the carriage for me, but I don't care to sit here to be stared at longer than I can help," she added, with a half-smile.

George leaped into the ditch, and partly helped and partly lifted her up the bank, and took her on his arm. She walked slowly, however, and leaned heavily upon him. When they reached the lodge, old Canham was gazing up and down the road, and Ann came out, full of consternation. They had seen the horse with the broken shafts gallop past.

"Then there's no bones broke, thank Heaven!" said Ann Canham, with tears in her meek eyes.

She drew forward her father's armchair before the open door, and Mrs. Chattaway sat down in it. She felt that she must have air, she said. "If I had but a drop o' brandy for Madam!" cried old Canham, as he stood near her and leaned all his weight on his stick.

George caught up the words. "I will go to the Hold and get some." And before Mrs. Chattaway could stop him, or say that she would prefer not to take the brandy he was away.

Almost at the same moment they heard the fast approach of a horse, and the master of Trevlyn Hold rode in at the gates. To describe his surprise when he saw his wife sitting, an apparent invalid, in old Canham's chair, and old Canham and Ann standing near in evident consternation, almost as pale as she was, would be a difficult task. He reined in so quickly that his horse was flung back on its haunches.

"Is anything the matter? Has Madam been taken ill?"

"There has been an accident, sir," answered Ann Canham, with a meek curtsey. "Mr. Christopher was driving out Madam in the dog-cart, and they were throwed out."

Mr. Chattaway got off his horse. "How did it happen?" he asked of his wife, an angry expression crossing his face. "Was it Cris's fault? I hate that random driving of his!"

"I am not hurt, James; only a little shaken," she replied, with gentleness. "Cris was not to blame. There was a razor-grinder in the road, grinding knives, and it frightened the horse."

"Which horse was he driving?" demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"A new one. One he bought from Allen."

The reply did not please Mr. Chattaway. "I told Cris he should not buy that horse," he angrily said. "Is the dog-cart injured?"

It was apparent from the question that Mr. Chattaway had not passed the *débris* on the road. He must have come the other way, or perhaps across the common. Mrs. Chattaway did not dare to say that she believed the dog-cart was very much injured. "The shafts are broken," she said, "and something more."

"Where did it occur?" growled Mr. Chattaway.

"A little lower down the road. George Ryle came up soon after it happened, and I walked here with him. Cris went on to the Hold to send the carriage, but I shall get home without it."

"It might have been worse, Squire," interposed old Canham, who, as a dependant of Trevlyn Hold, felt compelled sometimes to give the "Squire" his title to his face, though he never would, or did, behind his back. "Nothing hardly happens to us, sir, in this world, but what's more eased to us than it might be."

Mr. Chattaway had stood with his horse's bridle over his arm. "Would you like to walk home with me now?" he asked of his wife. "I can lead the horse."

"Thank you, James. I think I must rest here a little longer. I had only just got here when you came up."

"I'll send for you," said Mr. Chattaway. "Or come back myself when I have left the horse at home. Mr. Cris will hear more than he likes from me about this business."

"Such an untoward thing has never happened to Mr. Cris afore, sir," observed Mark Canham. "There's never a surer nor better driver than him for miles round. The young heir, now, he's different: a bit timid, I fancy, and—— "

"Who?" burst forth Mr. Chattaway, taking his foot from the stirrup, for he was about to mount, and hurling down

daggers at Mark Canham. "The young heir! To whom do you dare apply that title?"

Had the old man purposely launched a sly shaft at the master of Trevlyn Hold, or had he spoken only in inadvertence? He hastened to repair the damage, as he best could.

"Squire, I be growing old now—more by sickness, though, than by age—and things and people gets moithered together in my mind. In the bygone days, it was a Rupert Trevlyn that was the heir, and I can't at all times call to mind that this Rupert Trevlyn is not so: the name is the same, you see. What has set me to make such a stupid mistake this afternoon I can't tell, unless it was the gentleman's words that was here but an hour ago. He kept calling Master Rupert the heir; and he wouldn't call him nothing else."

Mr. Chattaway's face grew darker. "What gentleman was that, pray?"

"I never see him afore in my life, sir," returned old Canham. "He was a stranger to the place, and he asked all manner of questions about it. He called Master Rupert the heir, and I stopped him, saying he made a mistake, for Master Rupert was not the heir. And he answered I was right so far, that Master Rupert, instead of being the heir of Trevlyn Hold, was its master and owner. I couldn't help staring at him when he said it."

Chattaway felt as if his blood were curdling. Was this the first act in the great drama which he had so long dreaded? "Where did he come from? What sort of a man was he?" he mechanically asked, all symptoms of anger dying away in his sudden fear.

Old Canham shook his head. "I don't know nothing about where he's from, sir. He came strolling inside the gates, as folks strange to a place will do, looking about 'em just for curiosity's sake. He saw me a-sitting at the open winder, and he asked what place this was, and I told him it was Trevlyn Hold. He said he thought so, that he had been walking about looking for Trevlyn Hold: and he leaned his arm upon the winder-sill, and put nigh upon a hundred questions to me."

"What were the questions?" eagerly rejoined Mr. Chattaway.

"I should be puzzled to tell you half of 'em, sir, but they all bore upon Trevlyn Hold. About the Squire's death, and the will, and the succession; about everything in short. At last I

told him that I didn't know the rightful particulars myself, and he'd better go to you or Miss Diana."

Mrs. Chattaway stole a glance at her husband. Her face was paler than the accident had made it; with a more alarmed pallor. The impression clinging to her mind, and of which she had spoken to her husband the previous night—that Rupert Trevlyn was on the eve of being restored to his rights—seemed terribly strong upon her now.

"He was a tall, thin, strange-looking man, with a foreign look about him, and a red umberellar," continued old Canham. "A long white beard he had, sir, like a goat, and a odd hat made of cloth or crape, or some mourning stuff. His tongue wasn't quite like an English tongue, either. I shouldn't wonder but he was a lawyer, Squire: no one else wouldn't surely think of putting such a string of questions——"

"Did he—did he put the questions as an official person might put them?" rapidly interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

Old Canham hesitated; at a loss what precise reply to give. "He put 'em as though he wanted answers to 'em," returned he at length. "He said a word or two, sir, that made me think he'd been intimate once with the young Squire, Mr. Joe, and he asked whether his boy or his girl had growed up most like him. He wondered, he said, whether he should know either of 'em by the likeness, when he came to meet 'em, as he should do to-day or to-morrow."

"And what more?" gasped Mr. Chattaway.

"There was nothing more, Squire, in particular. He took his elbow off the winder-sill, and he went through the gates again and down the road. It seemed to me as if he had come into the neighbourhood for some special purpose connected with them questions."

It seemed so to some one else also. When the master of Trevlyn Hold mounted his horse and rode him slowly through the avenue towards home, a lively fear, near and terrible, had replaced that vague dread which had so long lain latent in his heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COLLECTION IN THE ROAD.

THE beauty of the calm autumn afternoon was marred by the hubbub and commotion of the crowd in the road. The rays of the sun came filtering through the foliage of the trees, the deep blue sky was without a cloud, the air was still and balmy: the whole imparted an idea of peace. But in that dusty highway, so lonely at other times, there had gathered a throng of people, and they talked and swayed, and altogether made much clatter and disturbance.

A throng that was momentarily being added to. Stragglers came up from all directions with eager eyes and open mouth. An accident, such as this which had befallen Madam Chattaway and her son, is an event in a locality where accidents are rare. An upset and broken shafts may be seen any day in the streets of London, but in a rustic place it is one of the incidents to be remembered for a lifetime.

The affair had got wind. How these affairs do get wind who can tell? It had been exaggerated in the usual fashion. "Madam was killed; and the dog-cart smashed to pieces; and the horse lamed; and Mr. Cris wounded." Half the gaping people who came up believed it all: and the chief hubbub was caused, not so much by discussing the accident, as by endeavouring to explain that its effects were not very disastrous.

The news had travelled with its embellishments to Trevlyn Farm, amidst other places; and it brought out Nora. Without waiting to put anything on, she took her way to the spot. Mrs. Ryle was expecting company that afternoon, and Nora was at leisure and *en grande toilette:* a black silk gown, its flounces edged with velvet, and a cap of blonde lace trimmed with white flowers. The persons who were gathered on the spot made way for her. The wrecked dog-cart lay partly in the ditch, partly out of it. Opposite was the grinding-machine, its owner now silent and crestfallen, as he inwardly speculated upon what the law could do to him.

"Then it's not true that Madam's killed?" cried Nora, after listening to the various explanations.

A dozen voices answered the question. "Madam warn't hurt to speak of, only shook a bit: she had telled 'em so her-

self. She had walked off on Mr. George Ryle's arm, without waiting for the carriage that Mr. Cris had gone to fetch."

"I'll be about that Jim Sanders," retorted Nora, wrathfully. "How dare he come bringing in such tales? He said Madam was lying dead in the road."

She had barely spoken, when the throng standing over the dog-cart was invaded by a new-arrival, one who had been walking in a neighbouring field, and wondered what the collection could mean. The rustics fell back and stared at him: first, because he was a stranger; secondly, because his appearance was somewhat out of the common way; thirdly, because he carried a red umbrella. A tall man with a long white beard, a hat, the like of which had never been seen by country eyes, and a foreign look.

You will at once recognize him for the traveller who had introduced himself at the parsonage as the Reverend Mr. Daw, a friend of its owner. The crowd, having had no such introduction, could only stare, marvelling where he came from, and whether he had dropped from the clouds. He had been out all the afternoon, taking notes of the neighbourhood, and since his conversation with old Canham—which you heard related afterwards to Mr. Chattaway, to that gentleman's intense dread—he had plunged into the fields on the opposite side of the way. There he had remained, musing and wandering, until aroused by the commotion in the road, to which he speedily made his way.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed. "An accident?"

The assemblage fell back to give him a wide berth. Rustics are prone to be suspicious of strangers, if their appearance is peculiar, and not one of them found a ready answer to the question. Nora, however, whose tongue had, perhaps, never been at fault in its whole career, stood her ground.

"There's not much damage done, as far as I can learn," she said, in her usual free manner. "The dog-cart's the worst of it. There it lies. It was Cris Chattaway's own; and I should think it will be a lesson to him not to be so fond of driving strange horses."

"Is it to the Chattaways that the accident has occurred?" asked the stranger.

Nora nodded. She was stooping down to survey more critically the damages done to the dog-cart. "Cris Chattaway was driving his mother out," she said, rising. "He was trying a strange horse, and this was the result," touching the

wheel with her foot. "Madam was thrown into the ditch here."

"And hurt?" laconically asked Mr. Daw.

"Only shaken—as they say. But a shaking may be dangerous for one so delicate as Madam Chattaway. A pity but it had been *him*."

Nora spoke the last word with emphasis so demonstrative that her hearer raised his eyes in wonderment. "Of whom do you speak?" he said.

"Of Chattaway: Madam's husband. A shaking might do him good."

"You don't like him, apparently," observed the stranger.

"I don't know who does," freely spoke Nora.

"Ah," said Mr. Daw, quietly. "Then I am not singular. *I* don't."

"Do you know him?" she rejoined.

But to this the stranger gave no answer; he had evidently no intention of giving any; and the reticence whetted Nora's curiosity more than any answer could have done, however obscure or mysterious. Perhaps no living woman within a circuit of five miles had a curiosity equal to that of Nora Dickson.

"Where have you known Chattaway?" she exclaimed.

"It does not matter," said the stranger. "He is in the enjoyment of Trevlyn Hold, I hear."

To say "I hear," as applied to the subject, imparted the idea that the stranger had only just gained the information. Nora threw her quick black eyes searchingly upon him.

"Have you lived in a wood not to know that James Chattaway was possessor of Trevlyn Hold?" she said, with her characteristic plainness of speech. "He has enjoyed it these twenty years, to the exclusion of Rupert Trevlyn."

"Rupert Trevlyn is its rightful owner," said the stranger, almost as demonstratively as Nora herself could have spoken.

"Ah," said Nora, with a sort of indignant groan, "the whole parish knows that. But Chattaway has possession of it, you see."

"Why doesn't some one help Rupert Trevlyn to his rights?"

"Who's to do it?" crossly responded Nora. "Can you?"

"Possibly," returned the stranger.

Had the gentleman asserted that he might possibly cause the moon to shine by day instead of by night, Nora could not have shown more intense surprise. "Help—him—to—his—rights?"

she slowly repeated. "Do you mean to say you could displace Chattaway?"

"Possibly," was the repeated answer.

"Why—who are you?" uttered the amazed Nora.

A smile flitted for a moment over Mr. Daw's countenance, the first symptom of a break to its composed sadness. But he gave no reply.

"Do you know Rupert Trevlyn?" she reiterated.

But even to that there was no direct answer. "I came to this place partly to see Rupert Trevlyn," were the words that issued from his lips. "I knew his father; he was my dear friend."

"Who can he be?" was the question reiterating itself in Nora's active brain. "Are you a lawyer?" she asked, the idea suddenly occurring to her: as it had, you may remember, to old Canham.

Mr. Daw coughed. "Lawyers are keen men," was his answering remark, and Nora could have beaten him for its vagueness. But before she could say more, an interruption occurred.

This conversation had been carried on aloud; neither the stranger nor Nora having deemed it necessary to speak in a low tone. The consequence of which was, that those in the midst of whom they stood had listened with open ears, drawing their own deductions—and very remarkable deductions some of them were. The knife-grinder—though a stranger to the local politics, and totally uninterested in them—had listened with the rest. One conclusion that *he* hastily came to at this juncture, was, that the remarkable-looking gentleman with the white beard *was* a lawyer; and he pushed himself to the front of the throng.

"You be a lawyer, master," he broke in, with some excitement. "Would you mind telling of me whether they *can* harm me. If I ain't at liberty to ply my trade under a roadside hedge but I must be took up and punished for it, why, it's a fresh wrinkle as I've got to learn. I've done it all my life; others as is in the same trade does it; can the law touch us?"

Mr. Daw had turned in wonderment. He had heard nothing of the grinding-machine in connection with the accident, and the man's address was unintelligible. A score of voices hastened to enlighten him, but before it was well done, the eager knife-grinder's voice rose above the rest.

"Can the laws touch me for it, master?"

"I cannot tell you," was the answer.

The man's low brow scowled fitfully: he was somewhat ill-looking to the eye of a physiognomist. "What'll it cost?" he roughly said, taking from his pocket a bag in which was a handful of copper money mixed with a sprinkling of small silver, mostly sixpenny and fourpenny pieces. "I might have knowed a lawyer wouldn't give nothing for nothing, but I'll pay to know. If the laws can be down upon me for grinding a knife in the highway as is open to the world, all I can say is, that the laws is infamous."

He stood looking at the stranger, with an air and manner of demand, not of supplication—and rather insulting demand, too. Mr. Daw showed no signs of resenting the incipient insolence; on the contrary, his voice took a kind and sympathizing tone.

"My good man, you may put up your money. I can give you no information about the law, simply because I am ignorant of its bearing on these cases. In the old days, when I was an inhabitant of England, I have seen many a machine such as yours plying its trade in the public roads, and the law, as I supposed, could not touch them, neither did it attempt to. But that may be altered now: there has been time enough for it; years and years have passed since I last set foot on English soil."

The razor-grinder, frowning none the less, thrust his bag into his pocket again, and began to push back to the spot from whence he had come. The gaping mob had listened with open ears. But they had gained little further information. Whether he was a lawyer or whether he was not; where he had come from, and what his business was amongst them, unless it was the placing of young Rupert Trevlyn in possession of his "rights," they could not tell.

Nora could not tell—and the fact did not please her. If there was one thing that provoked Nora Dickson more than all else, it was to be balked in her curiosity. She felt that she had been balked now. Turning away in a temper, speaking not a syllable to the stranger by way of a polite adieu, she began to retrace her steps to Trevlyn Farm, holding up the flounces of her black silk gown, that they might not come in contact with the dusty road.

But—somewhat to her surprise—she found that the mysterious stranger had also extricated himself from the busy mob, and was following her. Nora was rather on the high ropes just then, and would not notice him. He, however, accosted her.

"By what I gathered from a word or two you let fall, I should assume that you are a friend of Rupert Trevlyn's, ma'am?"

"I hope I am," said Nora, mollified at the prospect of enlightenment. "Few folks about here but are friends to him, unless it's Chattaway and that lot at the Hold."

"Then perhaps you will have no objection to inform me—if you can inform me—how it was that Mr. Chattaway came into possession of the Hold, in place of young Rupert Trevlyn. I cannot understand how it could possibly have been. Until I came here this day, I never supposed but that the lad, Rupert, was the Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

"Perhaps you'll first of all tell me what you want the information for?" returned Nora. "I don't know who you are, sir, remember."

"You heard me say I was a friend of his father's; I should like to be a friend to the boy. It appears to me to be a monstrous injustice that he should not have succeeded to the estate of his ancestors. Has he been *legally* deprived of it?"

"As legally as a properly-made will could deprive him," was the reply of Nora. "Legality and justice don't always go together in our parts: I don't know what they may do in yours."

"Joe Trevlyn—my friend—was the direct heir to Trevlyn Hold. Upon his death his son became the heir. Why did he not succeed?"

"There are folks that say he was cheated out of it," replied Nora, in very significant tones.

"Cheated out of it?"

"It is said that the news of Rupert's birth was never suffered to reach the ears of Squire Trevlyn. That the Squire went to his grave, never knowing that he had a grandson in the direct male line—went to it after willing the estate to Chattaway."

"Kept from it, by whom?" eagerly cried Mr. Daw.

"By those who had an interest in keeping it from him—Chattaway and Miss Diana Trevlyn. It is so said, I say: *I* don't assert it. There may be danger in speaking too openly to a stranger," candidly added Nora.

"There is no danger in speaking to me," he frankly said. "I have told you but the truth—that I am a friend of young Rupert Trevlyn's. Chattaway is not a friend of mine, and I never saw him in my life."

Nora, won over to forget caution and ill-temper, opened her

heart to the stranger. She told him all she knew of the fraud —a tacit fraud, surely, if not an active one—she told him of Rupert's friendlessness, of his undesirable position at the Hold. Nora's tongue, set going upon any grievance which she felt strongly, could not be stopped. It was like the wheels of a clock, that once wound up, must and will run down. They walked on until the fold-yard gate of Trevlyn Farm was reached. There Nora came to a halt. And there she was in the midst of a concluding oration, delivered with forcible eloquence, and there the stranger was listening eagerly, when they were interrupted by George Ryle.

Nora ceased suddenly. The stranger looked round, and seeing a gentleman-like man who evidently belonged in some way to Nora, lifted his hat. George returned it.

"It's somebody strange to the place," unceremoniously pronounced Nora, by way of introducing him to George. "He was asking about Rupert Trevlyn."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DANGER COMING VERY CLOSE.

If they had possessed extraordinarily good eyes, any one of the three, they might have detected a head peering at them over a hedge about two fields off, in the direction of Trevlyn Hold. The head was Mr. Chattaway's. That gentleman rode home from the lodge, after hearing old Canham's account of the mysterious visit, in a state not to be described. Encountering Miss Diana, he despatched her with Octave to the lodge to see after his wife; he met George Ryle, and told him *his* services were no further needed—that Madam wanted neither him nor the brandy; he sent his horse to the stable, and went indoors: all in a confused state of agitation, as if he scarcely knew what he was about.

Dinner was ready; the servants were perplexed at no one's coming in for it, and they asked if the Squire would sit down to it without Madam. *He* sit down to dinner—in that awful uncertainty? No; rather would he steal out and poke and pry about until he had learned something.

He left the house and plunged into the fields. He did not go back down the avenue, go openly past the lodge into the

road: cowards, with their fear upon them, prowl about stealthily —as Chattaway was doing now. Very grievously was the fear upon him.

He walked hither and hither: he stood for some minutes in the field which had once been so fatal to poor Mr. Ryle; his arms were folded, his head was bent, his newly-awakened imagination was in full play. He crept to the outer field, and walked under cover of its hedge until he came opposite all that hubbub and confusion. There he halted, and found himself a peep hole, and took in by degrees all that was to be seen: the razor-grinder and his machine, the dog-cart and its dilapidations, and the mob. Eagerly, anxiously did his restless eyes scan that mob; but he, upon whom they hoped to rest, was not amongst them. For you may be sure that Mr. Chattaway was searching after none but the dreaded stranger. Miserly as he was, he would have given a ten-pound note out of his pocket to obtain only a moment's look at him. He had been telling over all the enemies he had ever made, as far as he could remember them. Was it one of those?—some one who might owe him a grudge, and was taking this way of paying it out? Or was it a danger coming from a totally unknown quarter? Ten pounds! Chattaway would have given fifty then for a good view of the stranger; and his eyes were unmindful of the unfriendly thorns, in their feverish anxiety to penetrate to the very last of that lazy throng, idling away the summer's afternoon.

The stranger was certainly not amongst them. Chattaway knew every chattering soul of the whole lot. Some of his unconscious labourers made a part, and he only wished he dared appear and send them flying. But he did not care to do so. If ever there was a cautious man where he and his interests were concerned, it was Chattaway; and he would not run the risk of meeting this man face to face. No, no; rather let him get a bird's-eye view of him first, that he might be upon his guard.

It was no use looking any longer at the *débris* in the road and the gatherers around it. The state of the dog-cart did not by any means tend to soothe his feelings; neither did the sight of George Ryle, who passed through the crowd in the direction of his own home. He could see what a pretty penny it would take to repair the one; he knew not how many pence it might take to set right any mischief being hatched by the other. Mr. Chattaway turned away. He bore along noiselessly by the side

of the hedge, and then over a stile into a lower field, and then into another. That brought him in view of Trevlyn Farm, and —and—what did his restless eyes catch sight of?

Leaning on the fold-yard gate, dressed up in a style that was not often seen, stood Nora Dickson; on the other side was George Ryle, and with him one who might be recognized at the first glance—the strange-looking man, with his white hair, his red umbrella, and his queer hat, as described by old Canham. There could be no mistake about it; he it was: and the perspiration poured off the master of Trevlyn Hold in his mortal fear.

What were they hatching, those three? What *were* they hatching? That it did look suspicious must be confessed, to one whose fears were awakened, as were Chattaway's; for their heads were in close contact, and their attention was absorbed. Was he stopping at Trevlyn Farm, this man of treason? Undoubtedly he was: else why should Nora Dickson be decked out in company attire? Chattaway had always believed George Ryle to be a rogue, but now he knew him to be one.

It was a pity that Chattaway could not be listening as well as peeping. He would only have heard the gentleman explain to George Ryle who he was; his name, his calling, and where he was visiting in Barbrook. So far, Chattaway's doubts would have been at rest; but he would have heard no worse. George was less impulsive than Nora, and would not be likely to enter on the discussion of the claims of Rupert Trevlyn *versus* Chattaway, with a new acquaintance.

A very few minutes, and they separated. The conversation had been general since George came up; not a word having been said that could have alarmed intruding ears. Nora hastened indoors; George turned off to his rick-yard; and the stranger stood in the road and gazed leisurely about him, as if he were considering the points for a sketch in water-colours. Presently he disappeared from Chattaway's view.

That gentleman, taking a short time to recover himself, came to the conclusion that he might as well disappear also, in the direction of his home; where no doubt dinner was arrested, and its hungry candidates speculating upon what could have become of the master. It was of no use his remaining where he was. He had ascertained one point—that the dreaded enemy was an utter stranger to him. More than that he did not see that he could ascertain, in this early stage. He could not go boldly up to Nora or to George Ryle, tax them with

their treachery, and demand who and what the stranger was; he could still less go to the man himself. Cunning must be met with cunning; and the owner of Trevlyn Hold would no more have confessed to any fear or doubt that he should lose Trevlyn Hold, than he would voluntarily have resigned that desirable possession.

He wiped his damp face and set forth on his walk home, stepping out pretty briskly. It was as undesirable that suspicion should be directed towards his fear by those at home, as by outsiders. Were only an inkling of his fear to get abroad, it seemed to Chattaway that it would be half the business towards wresting Trevlyn Hold from him: he would not have it known that he feared it *could* be wrested from him. Therefore he walked on briskly, concocting a tale to account for his delay—that he had been to see a cow that was ill.

With the motion of walking, his courage partially came back to him; so exhilarating is bodily exertion on the human mind. The reaction once set in, his hopes went up, until he almost began to despise his recent terrible fear. It was absurd, he reasoned with himself; absurd to suppose this stranger could have anything to do with himself and Rupert Trevlyn. He was only some inquisitive traveller looking about the place for his amusement, and in so doing had picked up bits of gossip, and was seeking further information about them—all to while away an idle hour. Besides, the will *was* the Squire's will, and it could not be set aside; in our well-ordered country, a dead man's will, legally made, was held inviolate. If all the old women philanthropists of the kingdom ranged themselves into a body and took up the cause of Rupert Trevlyn, they could not act against that will. What a fool he had been to put himself in a fever on account of the man!

These consoling thoughts drowning the mind's latent dread—or rather making pretence to do so, for that the dread was there still, and would not be drowned, Chattaway was miserably conscious—he went on increasing his speed. At last, in turning into another field, he nearly knocked down a man running in the same direction, who had come up at right angles: a labourer named Hatch, who worked on his farm.

It was a good opportunity for Mr. Chattaway to let off a little of his ill-humour, and he demanded where the man had been skulking, and why he was away from his work. Hatch answered that, hearing of the accident to Madam and the young

Squire, he and his fellow-labourers had been induced to run to the spot in the hope of affording help.

"Hold your tongue," said Mr. Chattaway. "Help! You went off to see what there was to be seen, and for nothing else, leaving the rick half made. I have a great mind to dock you of a half-day's pay. What? Not been away five minutes? Why, it's——"

He came to a momentary pause. He could not say, as he was about to do: "It's a good twenty since I saw you there," for that would have betrayed more than he wished to betray. He changed the words.

"You have been there ever so long; you know you have. Is there so much to look at in a broken dog-cart, that you and the rest of you must neglect my work?"

The man took off his straw hat and rubbed his head gently: his common resort when in a quandary. They *had* hindered a great deal more time than was necessary, even allowing that going to the scene of action was at all essential; and they had certainly not bargained for its coming to the knowledge of the Squire. Hatch, too simple or too honest to invent excuses, could only make the best of the facts as they stood.

"'Twarn't looking at the dog-cart what kep' us, Squire. 'Twere listening to a strange-looking gentleman what were there: a man with a white beard and a red umberellar. He were talking about this here place, Trevlyn Hold, a-saying as it belonged to Master Rupert, and he were a-going to help him to it."

Chattaway turned away his face. Instinct taught him that even this stolid serf should not see the cold moisture that suddenly oozed from its every pore. "*What* did he say?" he cried, commanding his voice to an accent of scorn.

Hatch considered. And you—who heard what the man with the white beard really did say—must not too greatly blame the exaggerated reply. Hatch did not purposely deceive his master; but he did what a great many of us are apt to do—he answered according to the impression made on his imagination. He and the rest of the listeners had drawn their own conclusions, and it was in accordance with those conclusions he now spoke, rather than with the actual words he had heard. Had any one told Hatch he was telling untruths, he would have stared in amazement.

"He said for one thing, Squire, as he didn't like you. It were——"

"How does he know me?" broke from Mr. Chattaway, in his impulsiveness.

"Nora Dickson—'twere she he were talking to—asked him, but he wouldn't answer. He's a lawyer, he is, and——"

"How do you know that he's a lawyer?" again interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

"'Cause he said it," was the prompt reply of Hatch. And the man had no idea that it was an untruthful one. He as much believed the white-bearded stranger to be a lawyer as that he himself was a day-labourer. "He said as he had come here to help Master Rupert to his rights; he said as he had come to displace you from 'em. Our hairs stood all on end to hear him, Squire."

"Who is he?—where does he come from?" And to save his very life Chattaway could not have helped the words issuing forth in gasps.

"He never said where he come from—save that he hadn't been in England for a many year. We was a wondering among ourselves where he come from, after he walked off with Nora Dickson."

"Does she know?"

"No, that her don't, Squire. He come up while she were a standing there, and she wondered who he were, like we did. 'Twere through her asking of him questions that he said so much."

"But—what has he to do with my affairs?—what has he to do with Rupert Trevlyn?" passionately rejoined Mr. Chattaway.

It was a query that Hatch was unable to answer. "He said as he were a friend of the dead heir, Mr. Joe—I mind well he said that—and he said as he had come to this here place partly to see Master Rupert. He didn't seem to have knowed afore as Master Rupert had not got the Hold, and Nora Dickson—she's free of tongue, she is—asked if he'd lived in a wood not to ha' knowed that. So then he said as he should help him to his rights, and Nora she said, 'What! and displace Chattaway?' and he said, 'Yes.' We was so took aback, Squire, that we stopped a bit longer maybe nor we ought, and that's what it was as kep' us from the rick."

Every pulse of his heart beating, every drop of blood coursing in fiery heat, the master of Trevlyn Hold reached his home. He went in, and left his hat in the hall, and entered the dining-room, as a man in some awful dream. A friend of Joe

Trevlyn's!—come to help Rupert to his rights!—to displace *him!* The words rang their changes on his brain.

They had not waited dinner. It had been Miss Diana's pleasure that it should be commenced, and Mr. Chattaway took a seat mechanically. Mechanically he heard that his wife had declined partaking of it—had been ill when she reached home; that Rupert, after a hasty meal, had gone upstairs to lie down, at the recommendation of Miss Diana; that Cris had now gone off to the damaged dog-cart. He was as a man stunned. Miss Diana, who in his absence had taken the head of the table, called for a warm plate, and sent some meat to Mr. Chattaway. He took a mouthful of it, but found he could not swallow it.

"Have you dined?" inquired Miss Diana, perceiving that he laid down his knife and fork.

"No; but I am not hungry. I'll have a drop of brandy-and-water, I think. Get some hot water, James," he added to the servant.

The man brought the water, and Maude rose from her seat and mixed it. She placed the glass before him, and hastened to bring some biscuits. "They are very nice," she said, in a timid voice. "Fresh made to-day." It was impossible for Maude Trevlyn to speak otherwise than timidly to Mr. Chattaway.

"No, my dear, thank you. I can't eat them now."

Was it *Chattaway* speaking in that gentle tone—in those affectionate words? Maude blushed with the novelty, and Octave looked up in amazement. Octave came to the conclusion that her papa believed he had been speaking to her. Octave Chattaway had yet to learn that there is nothing like the anticipation of some dreadful evil for taking the spirit out of man or woman. Chattaway felt utterly unnerved.

The cloth was removed and the dessert placed upon the table. After taking a little fruit, the younger ones dispersed; Maude went upstairs to see how Mrs. Chattaway was; the rest to the drawing-room. The master of Trevlyn Hold paced the carpet, lost in thought. The silence was broken by Miss Diana.

"Squire, I am not satisfied with the appearance of Rupert Trevlyn. I fear he may be falling into worse health than usual. It must be looked to, and more care taken of him. I intend to buy him a pony to ride to and fro between here and Blackstone."

Had Miss Diana expressed her intention of purchasing ten ponies for Rupert, it would have made no impression then on Chattaway. In his terrible suspense and fear, a pony more or less was as an insignificant thing, and he received the announcement in silence, to the intense surprise of Miss Diana, who had expected to see him turn round in a blaze of anger.

"Are you not well?" she asked.

"Well? Quite well. I—I heated myself with riding, and —and feel quite chilly now. What should hinder my being well?" he continued, resentfully.

"I say I shall buy a pony for Rupert. Those walks backwards and forwards to Blackstone are too much for him. I think it must be that which is making him feel so ill; so I shall buy a pony for him."

"I wish you'd not bother me!" peevishly rejoined Chattaway. "Buy it, if you like. What do I care?"

"I'll thank you to be civil to *me*, Mr. Chattaway," said Miss Diana, with emphasis. "It is of no use your being put out about this business of Cris and the accident; and that's what you are, I suppose. Fretting over it won't mend it."

Mr. Chattaway caught at the mistake, eagerly favouring it. "It was such an idiotic trick, to put an untried horse into harness, and to let it smash the dog-cart!" he cried. "Cris did it in direct disobedience, too. I had told him he should not buy that horse."

"Cris does many things in disobedience," calmly rejoined Miss Diana. "I hope it has not injured Edith."

"She must have been foolish——"

A ring at the hall-bell—a loud, long, imperative ring—and Mr. Chattaway's voice abruptly stopped. *He* stopped: stopped in his walk, and stood stock still in the midst of the carpet, his eyes and ears alike open, his head bent forward, his whole senses on the alert. A prevision rushed over him that the messenger of evil had come.

"Are you expecting any one?" inquired Miss Diana.

"Be still, can't you?" almost shrieked Chattaway, throwing his hands up as in imploring agony. Her voice hindered his listening.

They were opening the hall-door then, and Chattaway's face was turning livid. There ensued a colloquy, and then James came into the room.

"A gentleman, sir, is asking to see Mr. Rupert."

"What gentleman?" interposed Miss Diana, before Chattaway could move or look.

"I don't know him, ma'am," replied James. "He seems strange to the place. He has a white beard, and looks foreign."

"He wants Mr. Rupert, did you say?"

"When I opened the door, first, ma'am, he asked if he could see young Squire Trevlyn; so I wanted to know who he meant, and said my master, Mr. Chattaway, was the Squire, and he replied that he meant the rightful Squire, Master Rupert, the son of Squire Trevlyn's heir, Mr. Joe, who had died abroad. He is waiting, ma'am."

Chattaway turned his white face upon the man. His trembling hands, his stealthy movements, showed his abject terror; even his very voice, which had dropped to the lowest whisper.

"Mr. Rupert's in bed, and can't be seen, James. Go and say so."

Miss Diana had stood in utter amazement—first, at the words repeated by James; secondly, at Mr. Chattaway's strange demeanour. "Why, who is it?" she cried to the servant.

"He didn't say his name, ma'am. He——"

"Will you go, James?" hoarsely cried Mr. Chattaway. "Go—go? Get rid of the man?"

"But he shall not get rid of him," interrupted Miss Diana. "I shall see the man. It is the strangest message I ever heard in my life. What are you thinking of, Squire?"

"Be still! Stop where you are!" returned Mr. Chattaway, arresting Miss Diana's progress to the door. "Do you hear, James? Go and get rid of this man. Turn him out, at any cost."

Did Mr. Chattaway fear that the visitor had come to take possession of the house in Rupert's name? Miss Diana could only look at him in wonderment. His face wore the hue of death; drops of water were gathering on it; he was evidently almost beside himself with some wild terror. For once in her life she did not assert her will, but suffered James to leave the room and "get rid" of the visitor in obedience to Mr. Chattaway.

He appeared to have no trouble in accomplishing it. A moment, and the hall-door was heard to close upon him. Chattaway opened that of the dining-room

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing, sir, except that he'd call again."

"James, does he—does he look like a madman?" cried Mr.

Chattaway, his tone changing to what might almost be called entreaty. "Is he insane, do you think? I could not let a madman enter the house, you know."

"I don't know, sir, I'm sure. His words were very odd, but he didn't seem mad."

Mr. Chattaway closed the door on the servant, and turned to his sister-in-law, who was regarding him in doubt, more puzzled than she had ever been in her life.

"I think it is you who are mad, Chattaway."

"Hush, Diana! I have heard of this man before. Sit down, and I will tell you about him."

He had come to a rapid conclusion that it would be better to tell her; to make her the confidant of the terrible news come to light. Not of his own fears, or of the dread which had lain deep in his heart: only of this that he had heard.

We have seen how the words of the stranger had been exaggerated by Hatch to Mr. Chattaway, and perhaps he now unconsciously exaggerated Hatch's words to him. Miss Diana listened in consternation. A lawyer!—come down here to depose them from Trevlyn Hold, and institute Rupert in it! "I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "He can't do it, you know, Chattaway."

Chattaway coughed ruefully. "Of course he can't. At least I don't see how he can, or how any one else can. My opinion is that the man *is* mad."

Diana Trevlyn was falling into thought. "A friend of Joe's?" she mused aloud. "Chattaway, could Joe have left a will?"

"Nonsense!" said Chattaway. He had thought the case over and over in all its bearings, and knew no harm could come from that quarter. "If Joe Trevlyn did leave a will, it would be null and void," he said. "He died in his father's lifetime, and the property was not his to leave."

"True. There can be no possibility of danger," she added, after a pause. "We may dismiss all fear as the idle wind."

"I wonder whether Rupert knows anything of this?"

"Rupert! What should he know of it?"

"I can't say," returned Mr. Chattaway, significantly. "I think I'll go up and ask him," he added, in a sort of feverish impulse.

Without a moment's pause, not waiting to hear what Miss Diana was saying, he hastened upstairs to Rupert's room. But the room was empty!

Mr. Chattaway stood transfixed. He had fully believed Rupert to be in bed, and the silent bed, unpressed, seemed to mock him. A strangely wild fear came over him that Rupert's pretence of going to bed had been but a *ruse*—that he had gone out to meet that dangerous stranger.

He flew down the stairs as one possessed; he dashed into rooms, shouting "Rupert! Rupert!" The household stole forth to look at him, and the walls echoed the name, "Rupert! Rupert!" But from Rupert himself there came no answer. He was not in the Hold.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MEETING AT MARK CANHAM'S.

RUPERT'S leaving the Hold, however, had been a very innocent matter. The evening sun was setting gloriously, and he thought he would stroll out for a few minutes before going to his chamber. When he reached the lodge he went in and flung himself on the settle, opposite old Canham and his pipe.

"How's Madam?" asked the old man. "What an accident it might have been!"

"So it might," assented Rupert. "Madam will be better after a night's rest. Cris might have killed her. I wonder how he'd have felt then?"

When Rupert came to an anchor, no matter where, he was somewhat unwilling to move from it. The settle was not a comfortable seat; rather the contrary; but Rupert kept to it, talking and laughing with old Canham. Ann was at the window, catching what remained of the fading light for her sewing.

"Here's that strange gentleman again, father!" she suddenly exclaimed in a whisper.

Old Canham turned his head, and Rupert turned his. The gentleman with the beard was going by in the direction of Trevlyn Hold, as if about to make a call there.

"Ay, that's him," cried old Canham.

"What a queer-looking chap!" exclaimed Rupert. "Who is he?"

"I can't make out," was old Canham's reply. "Me and Ann have been a-talking of him. He came strolling inside the

gates this afternoon with a red umberellar, a-looking here and a-looking there, and at last he see us, and come up and asked what place this was; and when I told him it was Trevelyn Hold, he said Trevlyn Hold was what he had been seeking for, and he stood there talking, a matter o' twenty minutes, leaning his arms on the winder-sill. He thought you was the Squire, Master Rupert. He had a red umberellar," repeated old Canham, as if the fact were remarkable.

Rupert glanced up in surprise. "Thought I was the Squire?"

"He came into this neighbourhood, he said, believing nothing less but that you were the rightful Squire, and he couldn't make out yet why you were not: he had been away from England a many years, he said, and had been believing it all the while. He said you *were* the true Squire, and you should be helped to your rights."

"Why! who can he be?" exclaimed Rupert, in excitement.

"Ah, that's it—who can he be," returned old Canham. "Me and Ann have been a-marvelling. He said—leastways, he as good as said—that he used to be a friend of the dead heir, Mr. Joe. Master Rupert, who knows but he may be somebody come to place you in the Hold?"

Rupert was leaning forward on the settle, his elbow on his knee, his eyes fixed on old Canham.

"How could he do that?" he asked after a pause. "How could any one do it?"

"It's not for us to say how, Master Rupert. If anybody in these parts could have said how it could be done, maybe you'd have been in it long afore this. That there stranger is a 'cute 'un, I know. White beards always is a sign of wisdom."

Rupert laughed. "I suppose you are thinking of the patriarchs; and we are apt to attribute wisdom to them. That man, now gone by, struck me as not a bad representation of our ideas of a patriarch. Only——"

"He ain't broad enough," interrupted old Canham; and Rupert laughed again at the earnest tone. "Look at them patriarchs on the east winder at church, Master Rupert; what fine broad men they be! This one's a lawyer, as it strikes me, and if he *is* come to help you to your rights, we shall all bless him for 't."

"Look here, Mark. It is no good going over that ground again. I have heard about my 'rights' until I am tired. The

subject vexes me; it makes me cross from its very hopelessness. I wish I had been born without rights."

"But you weren't born without 'em," contended old Canham. "Your grandfather was the Squire of Trevlyn Hold; and Mr. Joe, he was the heir—after the first heir, Mr. Rupert, died—and you be Mr. Joe's son. You *weren't* born without rights."

"Old ground, old ground, Mark," cried Rupert impatiently. "I wish you would not go over it. It's all true enough; I know it as well as you: my grandfather was Squire of Trevlyn Hold, and my father was his heir, and I am my father's son. But there the rights end. The rights are Chattaway's: and they never can be mine."

"This stranger, when he called you the heir of Trevlyn Hold, and I told him you were not the heir, he said I was right; you were not the heir, but the owner," persisted old Canham.

"Then he knew nothing about it," returned Rupert. "It's *impossible* that Chattaway can be put out of Trevlyn Hold."

"Master Rupert, there has always been a feeling upon me that he will be put out of it," resumed old Canham. "He came to it by wrongs, and wrongs never lasts out to the end without being righted. Who knows that the same feeling ain't on Chattaway? He turned the colour o' my Sunday smock-frock when I telled him o' this stranger's having been here and what he'd said."

"Did you tell him?" quickly cried Rupert.

"I telled him. I didn't mean to, but it come out of me uncautious-like. I called you the young heir to his face, and I excused myself by saying that the stranger had been a-calling you so, and I spoke out the same without thought. Then, in course, he wanted to know what stranger, and all about him. It was when Madam was resting here after the accident. Chattaway rode by and saw her, and got off his horse: it was the first he knew of the accident. If what I said didn't frighten him, I never had a day's rheumatiz in my life. His face went as white as Madam's."

"Chattaway go white!" scoffed Rupert. "What next? I tell you what it is, Mark; you fancy things. Aunt Edith may have been white; she often is; but not he. Chattaway knows that Trevlyn Hold is his, safe and sure. Nothing can take it from him—unless Squire Trevlyn came to life again, and made a fresh will. He's not likely to do that, Mark."

"No; he's not likely to do that," assented the old man.

"Once we be out of this world, Master Rupert, we don't come back again. The injustice that we have left behind us—and some of us do leave injustice—can't be repaired in that way."

Rupert rose. He went to the window, opened it, and leaned out, whistling. He was tired of the subject of "injustice" as touching himself; he had long believed it to be an unprofitable theme. He whistled through a whole piece of music that Maude was in the habit of playing, and was recommencing it when the tall man with the white beard came back again down the avenue.

Mr. Daw, for he it was, had the red umbrella in his hand. He turned his head to the window as he passed it, looked steadily at Rupert, paused, went close up, and put his hand on Rupert's arm.

"You are Rupert Trevlyn!"

"That is my name," replied Rupert.

"I should have known you anywhere from your resemblance to your father; I should have known you had I met you in the crowded streets of London. You are wonderfully like him."

"Where did you know my father?" inquired Rupert.

In place of answer the stranger opened the house-door and stepped into the room. Ann curtseyed; old Canham rose and stood with his hat in his hand—that white beard seemed to demand respect. He—the stranger—took Rupert's hand in his.

"I have been up to the house to inquire for you: but they told me you were not well, and had gone to rest."

"Did they?" said Rupert. "I had intended to lie down, but the evening was so pleasant that I came out instead. You spoke of my father: did you know him?"

"I knew him very well," said the stranger, taking the seat which Ann Canham had been dusting before offering; a ceremony, the dusting, which she apparently considered as a mark of respect. "Though my acquaintance with him was short, it was close. Do you know who baptized you?"

"No," replied Rupert, rather astonished at the question.

"I did. I christened your sister Maude; I baptized you. You were to be christened in England, your mother said, but she wished you baptized ere the journey commenced, and I did it when you were only a day old. Ah, poor thing! she thought to make the journey with you when she should be strong enough; but another journey claimed her—that of death! Before you were two days old she died. It was I who

wrote to announce your birth to Squire Trevlyn; it was I who, by the next post, announced your mother's death. It was I—my young friend, it was I—who buried your father and your mother."

"You are a clergyman, then?" said Rupert, somewhat dubious about the beard, and the very unclerical cut of the stranger altogether.

It may be that Mr. Daw saw the doubtful glances, and he entered upon an explanation. How he, when a working curate, had married a young lady of fortune, but of delicate health, and had then gone abroad with her, throwing up for the time his clerical preferment. The doctors had said that a warm climate was essential to her; as they had said, if you remember, in the case of Joe Trevlyn. It happened that both parties sought the same place—the curate and his wife, Joe and Mrs. Trevlyn—and a close friendship sprang up between them. A short while and Joe Trevlyn died; a shorter time still, and his wife died. There was no English clergyman near the spot, and Mr. Daw gave his services. He baptized the children; he buried the parents. His own fate was a happier one, for his wife lived. She lived, but she did not get well. It may be said—you have surely heard of such cases—that she only existed from day to day. She had so existed all through those long years, from that time until within a few months of this. "If you attempt to take her back to England, she will not live a month," the local medical men had said; and perhaps they were right. He remained on in the place, never quitting it. He had gone to it for a few months' sojourn, and he never left it for over twenty years. It reads like a romance. His wife's fortune had enabled him to live comfortably, and in a pecuniary point of view there was no need for him to seek preferment or to exercise his calling. He would never seek it now. Habit and use, as we read, are second nature, and the Reverend Mr. Daw had learnt to be an idle man. He had learnt to love the country of his adoption, his home in the Pyrenees; he had grown to believe that its genial climate was necessary to *himself*. His business in England concluded (it was connected with his late wife's will), he was hastening back to it. Had preferment been offered to him, he would have doubted his ability to fulfil its duties after so many years of disuse. The money that was his wife's was his now; would be his for the remainder of his days; so on that score he was at rest. In short, the Reverend William Daw had degenerated into an idle, useless man; one to whom

all exertion had become a trouble. He honestly confessed to it now, as he sat before Rupert Trevlyn; he told him that he had been content to live wholly for the country of his adoption, almost completely ignoring his own. He had kept up no correspondence with it. Of friends he could, as a young curate, boast but few, and he had been at no pains to keep them. At first he had believed that six or twelve months would be the limit of his absence from England, and he was content to leave the renewal of all friendships until his return. But he did not return; he stayed on; and the infrequent letter writing, once entered upon, was too pleasant to his indolent tastes not to be retained. He told all this quietly now to Rupert Trevlyn, and said that to it he owed his ignorance of the deposition of Rupert from Trevlyn Hold. Mr. Freeman was one of his few old college friends, and he might have heard all about it years ago had he only written to him.

"I cannot understand how it is that Mr. Chattaway should have succeeded," he cried, bending his dark eyes upon Rupert. "I can scarcely believe the fact now; it has amazed me, as one may say. Had there been no direct male heir; had your father left only Maude, for instance, I could have understood its being left away from her, although it would have been unjust."

"The Trevlyn property is not entailed," said Rupert.

"I am aware of that. During the last few months of your father's life, we were like brothers, and I knew all particulars as well as he did. He had married in disobedience to his father's will, but he never for a moment glanced at the contingency of himself or his children being disinherited. I cannot understand why Squire Trevlyn should have willed the estate from his son's children."

"He only knew of Maude—as they say."

"Still less can I understand how Mr. Chattaway can keep it. Were an estate willed to me, away from those who had a greater right to it, I should never retain it. I could not reconcile it to my conscience to do so. How can Mr. Chattaway?"

Rupert laughed—he believed that conscience and Mr. Chattaway had not a great deal to do with each other. "It is not much of his own interests that Mr. Chattaway will give up voluntarily," he observed. "Were my grandfather the Squire alive, Chattaway would not give up Trevlyn Hold to him, unless forced to it."

Old Canham could contain himself no longer. The conver-

sation did not appear to be coming to the point. "Be you a going to help young Master Rupert to regain his rights, sir?" he eagerly asked.

"I would—if I knew how to do it," said Mr. Daw. "I shall certainly represent to Mr. Chattaway the injustice—the wicked injustice—of the present state of things. When I wrote to the Squire on the occasion of your birth and Mrs. Trevlyn's death," he added, looking at Rupert, "the answers to me were signed 'J. Chattaway,'—the writer being no doubt the same Mr. Chattaway. He wrote again to me later, after Squire Trevlyn's death, requesting me to despatch the nurse and children to England."

"Oh yes," said Rupert carelessly, "it was safe enough for us to come then. Squire Trevlyn dead, and the estate willed to Chattaway, there was no longer danger from me. If my grandfather had got to know that I was in existence, there would have been good-bye to Chattaway's ambition. At least, people say so; *I* don't know."

The indifference of the tone forcibly struck Mr. Daw. "Don't *you* feel the injustice?" he asked. "Don't you care that Trevlyn Hold should be yours?"

"As to the injustice, I have grown up seeing the estate Chattaway's, and I suppose I don't feel it as I ought to. Of course, I should like it to be mine, but in the absence of all probability that it will be mine, it is as well not to think about it. Have you heard of the Trevlyn temper?" he continued, a merry smile dancing in his eyes as he threw them on the stranger.

"I have."

"They tell me I have inherited it, as I suppose a true Trevlyn ought to do. Were I to think too much of the injustice, I might arouse the temper: and it would answer no end, you know."

"Yes, I have heard of the Trevlyn temper," repeated the stranger. "I have heard what it did for the first heir, Rupert Trevlyn."

"But it did not do it for him," passionately burst forth Rupert. "I never heard—I never heard until the other day—not so many hours ago—of the slur that was cast upon his name. It was not he who shot the man; he had no hand in it: it was proved so later. Ask old Canham."

"Well, well," said the stranger, "it's all past and done with. Poor Joe reposed every confidence in me; treating me as a

brother. It was a singular coincidence that the Squire's sons should both die abroad. I hope," he added, looking kindly at Rupert, "that yours will be a long life. Are you—are you very strong?"

He put the question hesitatingly. He had heard from Nora that Rupert was not strong; and now that he saw him he was painfully struck with his delicate appearance. Rupert answered bravely.

"I should be very well if it were not for that confounded Blackstone walk night and morning. It's that that knocks me up."

"Chattaway had no call to put him to it, sir," interrupted Mark Canham again. "It's not work for a Trevlyn."

"Not for the heir of Trevlyn Hold," acquiesced the stranger. "But I must be going. I have not seen my friend Freeman yet, and I should like to be at the railway station when he arrives. What time shall I see you in the morning?" he added, to Rupert. "And what time can I see Mr. Chattaway?"

"You can see me at any time," replied Rupert. "But I can't answer for him. He breakfasts early, and generally goes out afterwards."

Had the Reverend Mr. Daw been able to see through a few trunks of trees, he might have seen Mr. Chattaway then. For there, hidden amidst the trees of the avenue, only a few paces from the lodge, was he.

Mr. Chattaway was pretty nearly beside himself that night. When he found that Rupert Trevlyn was not in the house, vague fears, to which he did not wait to give a more tangible name, rushed over his imagination. Had Rupert stolen from the house to meet this dangerous stranger clandestinely? He—Chattaway—scarcely knowing what he did, seized his hat and followed the stranger down the avenue, when he left the Hold after his useless visit.

Not to follow him with bold steps; to come up to him openly and say, "What is your business with Rupert Trevlyn?" No, no: cords would not have dragged Mr. Chattaway into that dreaded presence until he was sure of his ground.

He stole down, with a fleet, soft foot, on the well-trimmed grass beside the avenue, and close upon the lodge he overtook the stranger. Mr. Chattaway glided into the trees.

Peeping out from his hiding-place, he saw the stranger pause before the lodge window: he heard him accost Rupert Trevlyn; he watched him enter. And there he had been

since—his ears straining, his pulses beating, altogether in an agony both of body and mind.

Do as he would, he could not hear their conversation. The sound of the voices came upon him through the open window, but not the words spoken: and nearer he dared not go, for the trees near the lodge would not hide him. He might have gone round to the back and been sheltered, but he would have seen and heard nothing.

Hark! they were coming out. Chattaway's eyes glared and his teeth were set, as he cautiously looked round the trees. The man's ugly red umbrella was in one hand; the other was laid on Rupert's shoulder. "Will you walk with me a little way?" he heard the stranger say.

"No, not this evening," was Rupert's reply. "I must go back to the Hold."

But he, Rupert, turned to walk with him to the gate, and Mr. Chattaway took the opportunity to hasten back toward the Hold. When Rupert, after shaking hands with the stranger and calling out a good evening to the inmates of the lodge as he passed it, went up the avenue, he met the master of Trevlyn Hold pacing leisurely down it, as if he had come out for a stroll.

"Halloa!" he cried, with something of theatrical amazement. "I thought you were in bed!"

"I came out instead," replied Rupert. "The evening was so fine."

"Who was that queer-looking man just gone out at the gates?" asked Mr. Chattaway, with well-assumed indifference.

Rupert answered readily. His disposition was naturally open to a fault, and he saw no reason for concealing what he knew of the stranger. He was not aware that Chattaway had ever seen him until this moment.

"It is some one who has come on a visit to the parsonage. He is a clergyman himself. "It's a curious name, though—Daw."

"Daw? Daw?" repeated Mr. Chattaway, biting his lips to keep some colour in them. "Where have I heard that name—in connection with a clergyman?"

"He said he had some correspondence with you years ago. At the time when my mother died, and I was born. He knew my father and mother well. He has been telling me this in at old Canham's."

All that past time, its events, its correspondence, flashed

over Mr. Chattaway's memory—flashed over it with a strange dread. "What has he come here for?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know," replied Rupert. "He—— Whatever's this?"

It was a tremendous noise and shouting from many people, who appeared, dragging something along behind them. Both turned simultaneously—the master of Trevlyn Hold in awful fear. Could it be the stranger coming back with a flock of constables at his heels, to wrest the Hold from him? And if you deem these fears exaggerated, my reader, you know very little of this kind of terror.

It was nothing but a procession of those eager idlers, whom you saw in the road. They were dragging home the dilapidated, unlucky dog-cart: Mr. Cris at their head.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEWS FOR MISS DIANA.

In that pleasant room at the parsonage, with its sweet-scented mignonette boxes throwing in their perfume, and its vases of freshly-cut autumn flowers, sat the Reverend Mr. Freeman at breakfast, his wife, and their visitor. It was a simple meal. All meals were simple at Barbrook Parsonage: as they generally are where means are limited. And you have not yet to learn, I dare say, that comfort and simplicity frequently go together: while comfort and grandeur more rarely do. There was no lack of comfort at Mr. Freeman's: there was no lack of plenty in moderation. Coffee and rich milk: home-made bread and the freshest of butter, new-laid eggs and autumn watercress. It was by no means starvation.

Mr. Daw, however, paid less attention to the meal than he might have done had his mind been less preoccupied. The previous evening, when he and Mr. Freeman had first met, after an absence from each other of more than twenty years, their conversation had naturally run on their own personal interests: past events had to be related. But this morning they could go to other subjects, and Mr. Daw was not slow to do so. They were talking—you may have guessed it—of the Trevlyns.

Mr. Daw grew warm upon the subject. As he had done

the previous day, when Molly placed the meal before him, he almost forgot to eat. And yet Mr. Daw, in spite of his assurance to Molly that he considered a crust of bread and a cup of milk was a meal for a prince, or some assertion equivalent to it, did know how to appreciate good things. In plainer words, he was partial to them. Idle men who have no occupation for their days and years sometimes grow to be so.

"You are sparing the eggs," said Mrs. Freeman, a good-natured woman with a large nose, thin cheeks, and prominent teeth. "I wish you would eat more, Mr. Daw. We will get you some ham to-morrow morning."

Mr. Daw replied by taking another egg from the stand and chopping off its top. But there it remained. He was enlarging on the injustice dealt out to Rupert Trevlyn.

"It ought to be remedied, you know, Freeman. It must be remedied. It is a crying shame in the sight of God and man."

The curate—for Mr. Freeman was nothing more, for all his many years' services—smiled good-humouredly. He never used hard words. He preferred to let wrongs, which were no business of his, right themselves, or remain wrongs. He liked to take life as it came, easily and pleasantly.

"We can't alter it," he said. "We have no power to interfere with Chattaway. He has enjoyed Trevlyn Hold these twenty years, and he must enjoy it still."

"I don't know about that," returned Mr. Daw. "I don't know that he must enjoy it still. At any rate, he ought not to do so. Had I lived in this neighbourhood as you have, Freeman, I should have tried to get him out of it before this."

The parson raised his eyes. "He holds it by Squire Trevlyn's will."

"But there's such a thing as shaming people out of injustice," returned Mr. Daw. "Has any one represented to Chattaway the fearful injustice he is guilty of in his conduct towards Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I can't say," equably answered the parson. "I have not."

"Will you go with me and do it to-day?"

"Well—no; I think I'd rather not, Daw. If any good could come of it, perhaps I might do so; but there's not. And I find it answers best not to meddle with the affairs of other folk."

"But the wrongs dealt out to him are so great," persisted Mr. Daw, in his championship. "Not content with having

wrested Trevlyn Hold from the boy, Chattaway converts him into a common labourer in some coal office of his, making him walk to and fro night and morning. You know him?"

"Know him?" repeated Mr. Freeman. "I have known him well since he first came here, a child in arms." In truth, it was a superfluous question.

"Did you know his father?

"No; I never saw his father. It was after his father went abroad that I came to Barbrook."

"I was going to ask, if you had known him, whether you did not remark the extraordinary resemblance the young man bears to his father. The likeness is great; the form of the features, the voice, the general resemblance; but I alluded more immediately to the suspicious delicacy of the face. I should fear that the boy will go-off as his father did, and——"

"I have said a long while that he ought to live upon cod-liver oil," interposed Mrs. Freeman, who was doctor in ordinary to her husband's parish, and very decided in her opinion and remedies.

"Well, ma'am, that boy must die—if he is to die—Squire of Trevlyn Hold. I shall use all my means while I am here to bring this Chattaway to a sense of his injustice—to induce him to resign his possessions to the rightful owner. The boy seems to me to have had no friend in the world to take up his cause. What this Miss Diana can have been about, to stand tamely by and not interfere with him, I cannot conceive. She is the sister of his father."

"Better let it alone, Daw," said the parson. "Rely upon it, you will make no impression on Chattaway. It—it—you must excuse me for saying it, but it's quite foolish to think that you will. All Chattaway has in the world is Trevlyn Hold: he is not likely to throw himself out of it."

"I could not let it alone now," impulsively answered Mr. Daw. "The boy seems to have no friend, I say; and I consider that I have a right to constitute myself his friend. I'll say more than that—I should not be worthy the name of a man were I not to do it. I intended to stop with you only two nights; you'll give me house-room a little longer, won't you?"

"We'll give it you for two months, and gladly, if you can put up with our primitive mode of living," was the hospitable answer of the curate.

Mr. Daw shook his head. "Two months I could not remain; two weeks I might. I cannot go away leaving things in this most unsatisfactory state; I should have it on my conscience. The first thing I shall do this morning will be to go to the Hold, and seek an interview with Chattaway."

But Mr. Daw did not succeed in obtaining the interview with Chattaway. When he arrived at Trevlyn Hold, he was told the Squire was out. It was correct; Chattaway had ridden out immediately after breakfast. The stranger next asked for Miss Diana, and to her he was admitted.

Chattaway had said to Miss Diana in private, before starting, "Don't receive him should he come here; don't speak to him; don't let his foot pass over the door-sill." Very unwise advice, as Miss Diana judged; and she did not take it. Miss Diana had the sense to remember that an unknown evil is more to be feared than a known one. So long as we can see our enemies' tactics, we may meet and grapple with them; but who can fight in the dark? The stranger was ushered into the drawing-room by order of Miss Diana, and she came to him.

It was not a satisfactory interview, since nothing came of it; but it was a decently civil one. Miss Diana was cold, reserved, and somewhat haughty, but courteous; Mr. Daw was pressing, urgent, but respectful and gentlemanly. Rupert Trevlyn was the indisputable owner by right of Trevlyn Hold, was the substance of the points urged by the one; Squire Trevlyn was his own master, and made his own will, and it was not for his children and dependents to interfere against it, still less for a stranger, was the persistent answer of the other.

"Madam," said Mr. Daw, "did the enormity of the injustice never strike you?"

"Will you be so good as to tell me by what right you interfere?" returned Miss Diana. "I cannot conceive what business it can be of yours."

"I think the redressing of injustice should be made the business of every one."

"What a great deal every one would have to do!" exclaimed Miss Diana.

"As with regard to my right of interference, Miss Trevlyn, the law might not give me any; but I assume it by the bond of friendship. I was with his father when he died; I was with his mother. Poor thing! it was only within the last six or seven hours of her life that danger was apprehended. They

both died in the belief that their children would inherit Trevlyn Hold. Madam," he added, quite a blaze of light flashing from his dark eyes, "I have lived all the years since, believing that they were in the enjoyment of it."

"You believed rightly," equably rejoined Miss Diana. "They have been in the enjoyment of it. It has been their home."

"As it may be called the home of any of your servants," returned Mr. Daw; and Miss Diana did not like the comparison.

"May I ask," she continued, "if you came into this neighbourhood for the express purpose of putting this 'injustice' to rights?"

"No, madam, I did not. But there's no necessity for you to be sarcastic with me. I wish to urge the matter upon you in a friendly spirit, rather than in an adverse one. Business connected with my own affairs brought me to London some ten days ago, from the place where I had lived so long. As I was so near, I thought I would come down and see my former friend Freeman, before starting for home again; for I dare say I shall never more return to England. I knew Barbrook Parsonage and Trevlyn Hold were not very far apart, and I anticipated also the pleasure of meeting Joe Trevlyn's children, whom I had known as infants. I never supposed but that Rupert was in possession of Trevlyn Hold—that he had been so ever since his grandfather's death. You may judge what my surprise was when I arrived yesterday and heard the true state of the case. It is very probable that it struck upon me even more forcibly than the facts deserved, from my being so entirely unprepared for it."

"You have a covert motive in this," suddenly exclaimed Miss Diana, in a voice that had turned to sharpness.

"Covert motive?" he repeated, looking at her.

"Yes. Had you been, as you state, so interested in the welfare of Rupert Trevlyn and his sister, does it stand to reason that you would never have inquired after them through all these long years?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Trevlyn: the facts are precisely as I have stated them. Strange as it may seem, I never did once write to inquire after them, and the neglect strikes forcibly upon me now. But I am, I believe, naturally inert, and all correspondence with my own country had gradually ceased. I did often think of the little Trevlyns, but it was always to sup-

pose them as being at their own home, Trevlyn Hold, sheltered by their appointed guardian."

"What appointed guardian?" cried Miss Diana.

"Yourself."

"I! I was not the appointed guardian of the Trevlyns."

"Indeed, Miss Trevlyn, you were. You were appointed by their mother. The letter—the deed, I may say, for I believe it to have been worded in all legal form—was written when she was dying."

Miss Trevlyn had never heard of anything of the sort; of any deed. "Who wrote it?" she asked, after a pause.

"I did. When dangerous symptoms set in, and she was told that she might not live, Mrs. Trevlyn sent for me. She had her little baby baptized Rupert, for it had been her husband's wish that the child, if a boy, should be so named, and then I sat down by her bedside at her request, and wrote the document. She entreated Miss Diana Trevlyn—you, madam—to reside at Trevlyn Hold as its mistress, when it should lapse to Rupert, and be the guardian and protector of her children, until Rupert should be of age. She besought you to love them, and be kind to them for their father's sake; for her sake; for the sake, also, of the friendship which had once existed between you and her. This will prove to you, Miss Trevlyn," he added in a different tone, "that poor Mrs. Trevlyn, at least, never supposed there was a likelihood of any other successor to the estate."

"I never heard of it," exclaimed Miss Diana, waking up as from a reverie. "Was the document sent to me?"

"It was enclosed in the despatch which acquainted Squire Trevlyn with Mrs. Trevlyn's death. I wrote them both, and I enclosed them together, and sent them."

"Directed to whom?"

"To Squire Trevlyn."

Miss Diana cast her thoughts back. It was Chattaway who had received that despatch. Could he—*could he* have dared to suppress any communication intended for her? Her haughty brow grew crimson at the thought; but she suppressed all signs of annoyance.

"Will you allow me to renew my acquaintance with little Maude?" resumed Mr. Daw. "Little Maude then, and a lovely child; a beautiful young lady, as I hear, now."

Miss Diana hesitated—a very uncommon thing for her to do. It is strange what trifles turn the current of feelings: and this

last item of intelligence had wonderfully softened her towards this stranger. But she remembered the interests at stake, and thought it best to be prudent.

"You must pardon the refusal," she said. "I quite appreciate your wish to serve Rupert Trevlyn, but it can only fail, and further intercourse will not be agreeable to either party. You will allow me to wish you good morning, and to thank you."

She rang the bell, and bowed him out, with all the grand courtesy belonging to the Trevlyns. As he passed through the hall, he caught a glimpse of a lovely girl, with a delicate bloom on her cheeks and large blue eyes. Instinct told him it was Maude; and he likewise thought he traced some resemblance to her mother. He took a step forward involuntarily, to accost her, but recollected himself, and drew back again.

It was scarcely the thing to do: in defiance of the recent direct refusal of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN IMPROMPTU JOURNEY.

THE dew had been wet upon the grass in the autumn morning as the Squire of Trevlyn Hold rode from his door. He had hurried over his breakfast, his horse waiting for him, and he spurred him impatiently along the avenue. Ann Canham had not yet opened the gate. Upon hearing a horse's hoofs, she ran out to do so; and stood aside holding it back, and dropped her humble curtsey as Mr. Chattaway rode past. He vouchsafed not the slightest notice of her: neither by glance nor nod did he appear conscious of her presence. It was his usual way.

"He's off to Blackstone early," thought Ann Canham, as she fastened back the gate.

But Mr. Chattaway did not turn towards Blackstone. He turned in the opposite direction—to the left—and urged his horse to a gallop. Ann Canham looked after him.

"He have business at Barmester, maybe," was the conclusion to which she came.

Nothing more sure. Mr. Chattaway *had* business at Barmester. He rode briskly to the town, and pulled up his horse

almost at the same spot where you once saw him pull it up before—the house of Messrs. Wall and Barnes.

Not that he was about to visit that flourishing establishment this morning. Next to it was a private house, on the door-plate of which might be read, "Mr. Flood, Solicitor:" and he was the gentleman whom Mr. Chattaway had come to see.

Attracted probably by the clatter of the horse—for Chattaway had pulled up suddenly, and caused more noise than he need have done, the animal rather resenting the summary check, being fresh and somewhat restive—there came a face to the shop-door and looked out. It was that of Mr. Wall. He stepped forth to shake hands with Chattaway.

"How are you this morning? You are in Barmester betimes. What lovely weather we are having for the conclusion of the harvest!"

"Very; it has been a fine harvest altogether," replied Chattaway; and from his composure no one could have dreamt of the terrible care and perplexity that were running riot in his heart. "I want to say a word to Flood about a lease that is falling in, so I thought I'd start early and make a round of it on my way to Blackstone."

How subtle are the workings of the human heart! Had that been Chattaway's real business with the lawyer, he would not have gratuitously bestowed it on Mr. Wall: never was there a man less open in the ordinary affairs of life than Chattaway. Some vague feeling of wishing to divert suspicion or unpleasant conjecture from what he did want, was swaying him.

"An accident occurred yesterday to your son and Madam Chattaway, did it not?" asked Mr. Wall. "News of it was flying about last evening. I hope they are not much hurt?"

"Not at all. Cris was so stupid as to attempt to drive a horse unbroken for harness—one with a vicious temper, too. The dog-cart is smashed half to pieces. Here, you! come here."

The last words were addressed to a boy in a tattered jacket, who was racing after a passing carriage, having a mind to take a ride behind. Mr. Chattaway wanted him to hold his horse; and the boy changed his course with alacrity, believing the office would be good for sixpence at least.

The outer door of the lawyer's house was open. There was a second door in the passage, furnished with a knocker; the office opened on the left. Mr. Chattaway tried the office-door:

more as a matter of form than anything else. It was fast, as he expected, and would be until nine o'clock. So he gave an imposing knock at the other.

"I shall just catch him after his breakfast," soliloquized he, whilst he waited for it to be answered, "and can have a quiet quarter-of-an-hour with him, undisturbed by cli—— Is Mr. Flood at home?"

As he had tried the door in a mere matter of form, so he now put this question as one, and was passing in without ceremony. But the servant arrested him.

"Mr. Flood's out, sir. He is gone to London."

"Gone to London!" ejaculated Chattaway.

"Yes, sir, not an hour ago. He went by the eight-o'clock train."

It was so complete a check to all his imaginings, that for a minute the master of Trevlyn Hold found speech desert him. A great many bad men fly on the first threat of evil to a lawyer, in the firm belief that he can, by the exercise of his craft, bring them out of it. Chattaway, after a night of intolerable restlessness, had come straight off to his lawyer, Mr. Flood, with the intention of confiding the whole affair to him, and asking what was to be done in it; never giving so much as a glance at the possibility of that legal gentleman's absence.

"Went up by the eight-o'clock train?" he repeated when he found his voice.

"Yes, sir."

"And when's he coming home?"

"He expects to be away about a week, sir."

A worse check still. Chattaway's terrible fear might have waited in abeyance for a day; but for a week!—he thought he would go mad before its end. He was a great deal too miserly to spend money upon an unnecessary journey, but there appeared to be nothing for it but to follow Mr. Flood to London. That gentleman had heard perplexing secrets of Chattaway's before, had always given him the best advice, and remained faithful to the trust; and Chattaway believed he might safely confide to him this new and most dangerous fear. Not to any other would he have breathed a word. In short, the only confidential adviser he possessed in the world was Mr. Flood.

"Where will Mr. Flood put up in London?"

"I can't say, sir. I don't know anything about where he stays. He goes up pretty often."

"At the old place, I dare say," muttered Chattaway to him-

self. "If not, I shall learn where, through his agents in Essex Street."

He stood a moment in consideration on the pavement before mounting. There was a train—a slow and cheap one, that would leave Barmester in half-an-hour for London. Should he go by that train?—go from Barmester, instead of returning home to give them warning, and take the train at the little station near his own home? Was there need of haste so great? In Chattaway's present frame of mind the utmost haste he could make was almost a necessary relief to it: but, on the other hand, would his departing in this sudden and unaccountable manner excite suspicion at home and abroad, or draw unwelcome attention to his movements? Deep, deep in thought was he, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder. Turning sharply, he saw the honest hearty face of the linen-draper close to his.

"The queerest thing was said to me last night, Chattaway. I stepped into Robbins the barber's, to have my hair and whiskers trimmed, and he told me a great barrister was down here, a leading man from the Chancery court, come upon some business connected with you and the late Squire Trevlyn. With the property, I mean."

Chattaway's heart leaped into his mouth.

"I thought it a queer tale," continued Mr. Wall. "His mission here—the Chancery messenger's—being to restore Rupert Trevlyn to the estates of his grandfather, Robbins said. Is there anything in it?"

Had the public already got hold of it, then? Was the awful thing no longer a fear but a reality? Chattaway turned his face away, and tried to be equal to the emergency. At another time, the fanciful aspects that gossip acquires in spreading, might have afforded him amusement.

"You are talking great absurdity, Wall. Robbins! Who's Robbins? Were I you, I should be ashamed to repeat the lies propagated by that chattering old woman."

Mr. Wall laughed. "He certainly deals in news, does Robbins; it's part of his trade. Of course one only takes his marvels for what they are worth. He got *this* from Barcome, the tax-collector. The man had arrived at the scene of accident to the dog-cart shortly after its occurrence, and he heard this barrister—who, as it seems, was also there—speaking publicly of the object of his mission."

Chattaway snatched the bridle of his horse from the ragged

boy's hands, and mounted; his air, his face, expressing all the scorn he could command. "When they can impound Squire Trevlyn's will, then they may talk about altering the succession. Good morning, Wall."

A torrent of howls, interspersed with words that a magistrate on the bench must have shown himself cognizant of, saluted his ears as he rode off. They came from the aggrieved steed-holder. Instead of the sixpence he so fondly reckoned on, Chattaway had flung him a halfpenny.

He rode to an inn near the railway station, went in and called for pen and ink. The few words he wrote were to Miss Diana. He found himself obliged to go unexpectedly to London on the business *which she knew of*, and requested her to make any plausible excuse for his absence that would divert suspicion from the real facts. He should be home on the morrow. Such was the substance of the note.

He addressed it to Miss Trevlyn of Trevlyn Hold, sealed it with his own seal and marked it "private." A most unnecessary additional security, the last. No inmate of Trevlyn Hold would dare to open the most simple missive, bearing the address of Miss Trevlyn. Then he called one of the stable-men.

"I want this letter taken to my house," he said. "It is in a hurry. Can you go at once?"

The man replied that he could.

"Stay—you may ride my horse," added Mr. Chattaway, as if the thought that moment struck him. "You will get there in half the time that you would if you walked."

"Very well, sir. Shall I bring him back for you?"

"Um—m—m, no, I'll walk," decided Mr. Chattaway, stroking his chin as if to help his decision. "Leave the horse at the Hold."

The man mounted the horse and rode away, never supposing that Mr. Chattaway had been playing off a little *ruse* for his especial benefit, and that he had no intention of going to Trevlyn Hold that day, but was bound for a place rather farther off. In this innocent state of unconsciousness, he reached the Hold, while Mr. Chattaway made a *détour* and gained the station by a cross route, where he took train for London.

Cris Chattaway's groom, Sam Atkins, was standing with his young master's horse before the house, in waiting for that gentleman, when the messenger arrived. Not the new horse

of the previous day's notoriety, not the one lamed at Blackstone; but a despised and steady old animal sometimes used in the plough.

"What! there haven't been another accident sure-ly!" exclaimed Sam Atkins, in his astonishment at seeing Mr. Chattaway's steed brought home. "Where's the Squire?"

"He's all right; he have sent me up here with this," was the man's reply, producing the note. And at that moment Miss Diana Trevlyn appeared at the hall-door. Miss Diana was looking out for Mr. Chattaway. After the communication made to her that morning by Mr. Daw—that he had forwarded to the Hold a document containing the last wishes of Mrs. Trevlyn, which appointed her (whether legally or not) the guardian of the two children—she could only come to the conclusion that the paper had been suppressed by Chattaway, and she was waiting in much wrath to demand his explanation of it.

"What brings the Squire's horse back?" she imperiously demanded.

Sam Atkins handed her the note, which she opened and read. Read it twice attentively, and then turned indoors. "Chattaway's a fool!" she angrily decided. "He is allowing this mare's-nest to take hold of his fears. He ought to know that while my father's will is in existence no power on earth can deprive him of Trevlyn Hold."

She went upstairs to Mrs. Chattaway's sitting-room. That lady, considerably recovered from the shock of the fall, was seated at the table, writing an affectionate letter to her daughter Amelia, telling her she might come home with Caroline Ryle. Miss Diana went straight up to the table, took a seat, and without the least apology or ceremony, closed Mrs. Chattaway's desk.

"I want your attention for a moment, Edith. You can write afterwards. Can you carry your memory back to the morning, so many years ago, when we received the news of Rupert's birth?"

"No effort is needed to do that, Diana. I think of it all too often."

"Very good. Then perhaps, without effort, you can recall the day following that, when the letter came announcing Mrs. Trevlyn's death?"

"Yes, I remember it also."

"The minute details? Could you, for instance, relate any

of the circumstances attending the arrival of that letter, if required to do so in a court of law? What time of the day it came, who opened it, where it was opened, and so forth?"

"Why do you ask me?" returned Mrs. Chattaway, surprised at the questions.

"I ask you to be answered. I have a reason for wishing to recall these past things. Think it over."

"Both the letters, so far as I can recollect, were given to Mr. Chattaway, and he opened them. He was in the habit then of opening papa's business letters. I have no doubt they were opened in the steward's room; James used to be there a great deal with the accounts and other matters connected with the estate. I cannot think why you ask me this."

"I have always known that James Chattaway did open those letters," said Miss Diana; "but I thought you might have been present at their opening. Were you?"

"No. I remember his coming into my chamber later, and telling me Mrs. Trevlyn was dead. I never shall forget the shock I felt."

"Attend to me, Edith. I have reason to believe that inside the last of those letters there was an inclosure for me. It never reached me. Do you know what became of it?"

The blank surprise on Mrs. Chattaway's countenance, her open questioning gaze at her sister, was a sufficient denial without words.

"I see you do not," said Miss Diana. "And now I am going to ask you something else. Did you ever hear that Emily Trevlyn, when she was dying, left a request that I should be guardian to her children?"

"Never," replied Mrs. Chattaway. "Have you been dreaming these things, Diana? Why should you ask about them now?"

"I leave dreams to you, Edith," was Miss Diana's reply. "My health is too sound to admit of sleeping dreams; my mind too practical to indulge in waking ones. Never mind why I asked: it was only as a personal matter of my own. By the way, I have had a line from your husband, written from Barmester. A little business has taken him out, and he may not be home until to-morrow. We are not to sit up for him."

"Has he gone to Nettleby hop fair?" hastily rejoined Mrs. Chattaway.

"Maybe," said Miss Diana, carelessly. "At any rate, say

nothing about his absence to any one. The children are unruly if they know he is away. I suppose he will be home to-morrow."

But Mr. Chattaway was not home on the morrow. Miss Diana was burning with impatience for his return; that explanation was being waited for, and she was one who brooked not delay: but she was obliged to submit to it now. Day after day passed on, Mr. Chattaway was still absent from Trevlyn Hold.

"What a time he is away!" quoth the servants in their familiar intercourse with each other. "He might be buying up all the hops in Nettleby."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WALK BY STARLIGHT.

A HARVEST-HOME used to be a great *fête* in farmhouses; chiefly so, as you are aware, for its servants and labourers. It is so in some houses still. A rustic, homely, social gathering; with plenty, in a plain way, to eat and drink, and where the masters and mistresses and their guests enjoy themselves as freely as their dependents.

Trevlyn Farm was lighted up to-night. The best kitchen, that large entrance room where you have seen Nora sitting sometimes, and which was never used for kitchen purposes, was set out with a long table as for dinner. Cold beef and ham, substantial and savoury meat pies, fruit pies, cakes, cheese, ale and cider, were being placed on it. Seats, chiefly benches, lined the walls, and the rustic labourers were coming sheepishly in. Some of them had the privilege of bringing their wives, who came in a great deal less sheepishly than the men.

Nanny was in full attire, a new green stuff gown and white apron; Molly from the parsonage was flaunting in a round cap, which the fashionable servants wore in Barmester, with red streamers hanging down; Ann Canham had a new Scotch plaid kerchief, white and purple, crossed on her shoulders; and Jim Sanders's mother, being rather poorly off for smart caps, wore a bonnet. These four were to do the waiting; and Nora was casting over them all the superintending eye of a

mistress. George Ryle liked to make his harvest-homes liberal and comfortable, and Mrs. Ryle seconded it. She was of the open-handed nature of the Trevlyns.

What Mrs. Ryle would have done, but for Nora Dickson, it was impossible to say. She really took little more management in the house than a visitor would take. Her will, it is true, was law: she gave orders, often in minute details; but she left the execution of them to others. Though she had married Thomas Ryle, the tenant of Trevlyn Farm, she never forgot that she was the daughter of Trevlyn Hold.

She sat in the small room opening from the supper-room—small in comparison with the drawing-room, but still commodious. On the harvest-home night, the visitors—Mrs. Ryle's visitors—were received in that ordinary room and sat there, forming, it may be said, part of the supper-room company, for the door was kept wide, and the great people went in and out, mixing with the small. George Ryle and the parson, Mr. Freeman, would be more in the supper-room than in the other; they were two who liked to see the hard-working people happy now and then.

Mrs. Ryle had taken up her place in the sitting-room; her gown of rich black silk and her real lace cap contrasting with the more showy attire of Mrs. Apperley, who sat next her. Mrs. Apperley was in a stiff brocade, yellow satin stripes flanking wavy lines of flowers. It had been her gala robe for years and years, and looked new yet. A wonderfully handsome silk, had it not been out of date. Mrs. Apperley's two daughters, in cherry-coloured ribbons and cherry-coloured hair-nets, were as gay as she was; they were whispering to Caroline Ryle, a graceful girl in dark-blue silk, with the blue eyes and the fair hair of her deceased father. Farmer Apperley, in top-boots, was holding an argument on the state of the country with a young gentleman who sat carelessly on the arm of the old-fashioned sofa, a young man of middle height and dark hair, stout for his years. It was Trevlyn Ryle. George had set his back against the wall, and was laughingly quizzing the Miss Apperleys, of which they were blushingly conscious. Were you to believe Nora, there was scarcely a young lady within the circuit of a couple of leagues but was privately setting her cap at handsome George.

A bustle in the outer room, and Nanny appeared with an announcement: "Parson and Mrs. Freeman." I am not responsible for the style of the introduction: you may hear it for

yourselves if you choose to penetrate to some of our rural districts.

Parson and Mrs. Freeman came in without ceremony; the parson with his hat and walking-stick, Mrs. Freeman in a green calico wadded hood and an old cloak. George, with laughing gallantry, helped her to take them off, and handed them to Nanny, and Mrs. Freeman went up to the pier-glass and settled the white bows in her cap to greater effect.

"But I thought you were to have brought your friend," said Mrs. Ryle.

"He will come in presently," replied the parson. "A letter arrived for him by this evening's post, and he wished to answer it."

Farmer Apperley turned from his colloquy with Trevlyn. "D'ye mean that droll-looking man who walks about with a red umbrella and a goat's beard, parson?"

"The same," said Mr. Freeman, settling his double chin more comfortably in his cravat, which was white this evening. "He has been staying with us for a week past."

"Ay. Some foreign folk, isn't he, named Daw? There's all sorts of tales abroad in the neighbourhood, as to what he is stopping down here for. I don't know whether they be correct."

"I don't know much about it myself, either," said Mr. Freeman. "I am glad to entertain him as an old friend, but for any private affairs or views of his, I don't meddle with them."

"Best plan," nodded the farmer in approval. And the subject, thus indistinctly hinted at, was allowed to drop, owing probably to the presence of Mrs. Ryle.

"The Chattaways are coming here to-night," suddenly exclaimed Caroline Ryle. She spoke only to Mary Apperley, but there was a pause in the general conversation just then, and the remark was audible to the room. Mr. Apperley took it up.

"Who's coming? The Chattaways! Which of the Chattaways?" he said in some surprise, knowing that they had never been in the habit of paying evening visits to Trevlyn Farm.

"All the girls, and Maude," replied Caroline. "I don't know whether Rupert will come; and I don't think Cris was asked."

"Eh, but that's a new move," cried Farmer Apperley, his long intimacy with the Farm justifying the freedom. "Did you invite them?"

"In point of fact, they invited themselves," interposed Mrs. Ryle, before George, to whom the question had been addressed,

could speak. "At least, Octave did so: and then George, I believe, asked the rest of the girls."

"They won't come," said Farmer Apperley.

"Not come!" interrupted Nora, sharply, who kept going in and out between the two rooms. "That's all you know about it, Mr. Apperley. Octave Chattaway is as sure to come here to-night——"

"Nora!"

The interruption came from George. Was he afraid of what she might say in her heat? Or did he see, coming in then at the outer door, Octave herself? Octave was coming in—as if to refute the opinion of Mr. Apperley.

But only Amelia was with her. A tall girl with a large mouth and very light hair, ever on the giggle. "Where are the rest?" impulsively asked George, his accent too unguarded to conceal its disappointment.

Octave detected it. She had thrown off her cloak and stood forth in attire scarcely suited to the occasion—a pale blue evening dress of damask, a silver necklace, silver bracelets, and a wreath of silver flowers in her hair. Nanny could hardly take the cloak for staring. "What 'rest?'" asked Octave.

"Your sisters and Maude. They promised to come.'

Octave tossed her head good-humouredly. "*Do* you think we could inflict the whole string on Mrs. Ryle? Two of us will be sufficient to represent the family."

"Inflict! On a harvest-home night!" called out Trevlyn. "You know, Octave, the more the merrier, then."

"Why, I really believe that's Treve!" exclaimed Octave. "When did you come?"

"This morning. You have grown thinner, Octave."

"It is nothing to you if I have," retorted Octave, offended at the remark. The point was a sore one; Octave being unpleasantly conscious that she was thin to ugliness. "*You* have got plump enough, at any rate."

"To be sure," said Treve. "I'm always jolly. It was too bad of you, Octave, not to bring the rest."

"So it was," said Amelia. "They had dressed for it, and at the last moment Octave made them stay at home."

But George was not going to take this quietly. Saying nothing, he left the room and made the best of his way to Trevlyn Hold. But the rooms seemed deserted. At length he found Maude in the schoolroom; ostensibly correcting exercises; in reality crying. After they had dressed for the

visit, Octavia had placed her veto upon it, and Emily and Edith had retired to bed in very vexation. Miss Diana was not at home; she was spending the evening out with Mrs. Chattaway, and Octave had had it all her own way.

"I have come for you, Maude," said George.

Maude's heart beat with the anticipation. "I do not know whether I may dare to go," she said, glancing shyly at him.

"Has any one forbidden you except Octave?"

"Only Octave."

Lying on a chair, George saw a bonnet and a cloak which he recognized as Maude's. In point of fact, she had thrown them off when forbidden the visit by Miss Chattaway. His only answer was to fold the cloak around her. And she put on the bonnet, and went out with him, shocked at her own temerity, but unable to resist the temptation.

"You are trembling, Maude," he cried, drawing her closer to him as he bent his head.

"I am afraid of Octave. I know she will be so angry. What if she should meet me with insulting words?"

"Then—Maude—you will give me leave to answer her?"

"Yes. Oh yes."

"It will involve more than you are thinking of," said George, laughing at her eager tone. "I must tell her, if necessary, that I have a right to defend you."

Maude stopped in her surprise, and half drew her arm from his as she looked up at him in the starlight. His pointed tone stirred all the pulses in her heart.

"You cannot have mistaken me, Maude, for this long while past," he quietly said. "If I have not spoken to you more openly; if I do not yet speak out to the world, it is that I see at present little prospect before us. I would prefer not to speak to others until that shall be more assured."

Maude, in spite of the intense feeling of happiness which was rising within her with a force not to be suppressed, felt half sick with fear. What of the powers of Trevlyn Hold?

"Yes, there might be opposition there," said George, divining her thoughts, "and the result—great unpleasantness altogether. I am independent enough to defy them, but you are not, Maude. For that reason I will not speak if I can help it. I hope Octave will not too greatly provoke me."

Maude started, as a thought flashed over her, and she looked up at George, a terrified expression in her face. "You *must*

not speak, George; you must not, for my sake. Were Octave only to suspect this, she—she——."

"Might treat you to a bowl of poison—after the stage fashion in what they call the good old days," he said, laughing. "Child, do you think I have been blind? I understand."

"You will be silent, then?"

"Yes," he answered, after a pause. "I will, at present, Maude."

They had taken the way through the fields—it was the nearest way—and George spoke of his affairs as he walked; more confidentially than he had ever in his life entered upon them to any one. That he had been in a manner sacrificed to the interests of Treve, there was no denying, and though he did not allude to it in so many words, it was impossible to ignore the fact entirely to Maude. A short while, one more term to keep at Oxford, and Treve was to enter officially upon his occupation of Trevlyn Farm. The lease would be transferred to his name; he would be its sole master; and George must look out for another home: but until then he was bound to the farm—and bound most unprofitably. To the young, however, all things wear a hopeful hue. What would some of us give in after-life for the *couleur-de-rose* which almost invariably imbues its threshold!

"By the spring I may be settled in a farm of my own, Maude. I have been casting a longing eye to the Upland. Its lease will be out at Lady-day, and Carteret leaves it. An unwise man in my opinion, he: to leave a certainty of competency here, for uncertain riches in the New World. But that is his business; not mine. I should like the Upland Farm."

Maude's breath was nearly taken away. It was the only large farm on the Trevlyn estate. "You surely would not risk that, George! What an undertaking!"

"Especially with Chattaway for a landlord, you would say. I shall take it if I can get it. The worst is, I should have to borrow money," he added, in a very serious tone. "And borrowed money weighs one down like an incubus. Witness what it did for my father. But I dare say we should manage to get along."

Maude opened her lips. She was wishing to say something that she did not quite well know how to say. I—I fear——" and there she stopped in timidity.

"What do you fear, Maude?"

"I don't know how I should ever manage in a farm," she said, feeling that she ought to speak out her doubts, but blushing vividly under cover of the dark night at having to do it. "I have been brought up so—so—uselessly—as regards domestic duties."

"Maude," he gravely said, "if I thought I should marry a wife only to make her work, I should not marry at all. We will manage better than that. You have been brought up a lady; and, if I may avow the truth, I should not care for my wife to be anything else. My mother—I mean Mrs. Ryle—has never done anything of the sort, you know, thanks to good Nora. And there are more Noras in the world. Shall I tell you a favourite scheme of mine, one that has been in my mind for some time now?"

She turned—waiting to hear it.

"To give a shelter to Rupert. You and I. To welcome him to our home. We could contrive to make him happier than he is made now."

Maude's heart leaped at the vision. "Oh, George! if it could be! How good you are! Rupert——"

"Hush, Maude!" The sudden check was not spoken to interrupt any expression touching his "goodness;" George would only have laughed at that; but because he had become conscious of the proximity of others walking and talking like themselves. Two voices were in contention with each other; or, if not in contention, speaking as if their opinions did not precisely coincide: and to George's intense astonishment, he recognized one of the voices as Mr. Chattaway's. He uttered a suppressed exclamation.

"It cannot be, George," she whispered. "He is miles and miles away. Even allowing that he had returned, what should bring him here?—he would have gone direct to the Hold."

But George was positive that it was Chattaway's voice. They—the people to whom the voices belonged—were advancing down the path on the other side the hedge, and would probably be coming through the gate, right in front of George and Maude. To meet Chattaway was not particularly coveted by either of them, even at the most convenient of opportunities, and at the present time it was not at all convenient. George drew Maude under one of the great elm trees, which overshadowed the hedge on this side.

"Just for a moment, Maude, until they shall have passed. I am certain it is Chattaway!"

The gate swung open and somebody came through it. Only one. Sure enough it was Chattaway. He strode onwards, muttering to himself, a brown paper parcel in his hand. But ere he had gone many steps, he halted, turned, came creeping back, and stood peering over the gate at the man who was walking away. A little movement of his head to the right, and Mr. Chattaway might have seen George and Maude standing there.

But he did not. He was grinding his teeth and working his disengaged hand, and was altogether too much occupied with the departing man, to pay undesirable attention to what might be around himself. Finally, his display of anger somewhat cooling down, he turned again and continued his way towards Trevlyn Hold.

"Who can it be that he is so angry with?" whispered Maude.

"Hush!" cautioned George. "His ears are sharp."

Very still they remained until he was at a safe distance, and then they went through the gate. Almost beyond their view a tall man was pacing slowly along in the direction of Trevlyn Farm, a red umbrella (but in truth George guessed at its colour in the light night, rather than distinguished it) whirling round and round in his hand.

"Ah, just as I thought," was George's comment to himself.

"Who is it, George?"

"That stranger who is visiting at the parsonage."

"He seemed to be quarrelling with Mr. Chattaway."

"I don't know. Their voices were loud. I wonder if Rupert has found his way to the Farm?"

"Octave forbade him to go."

"Were I Ru I should break through *her* trammels at any rate, and show myself a man," remarked George. "He may have done so to-night."

They turned in at the garden-gate, and gained the porch. All signs of the stranger had disappeared, and sounds of merriment came from within.

George turned Maude's face to his. "You will not forget, my love?"

"Forget what?" she shyly answered.

"That from this night we begin a new life. Henceforth, we belong to each other. Maude, Maude! you will not forget!" he feverishly continued.

"I shall not forget," she softly whispered.

And, possibly by way of a reminder, Mr. George, under cover of the shaded and silent porch, took his first lover's kiss from her lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VISIT TO DOCTORS' COMMONS.

BUT where had Mr. Chattaway been all that time? And how came it that he was seen by George Ryle and Maude hovering about his own ground at night, when he was supposed to be miles away? The explanation can be given.

Mr. Chattaway found, as many of us do, that lets and hindrances intrude themselves into the most simple plans. When he took the sudden resolution that morning, now some days ago, to run up to London from Barmester after Flood the lawyer, and sent his horse home, and also a word of communication to Miss Diana Trevlyn, to the effect that he should be home on the morrow, he never supposed that his journey would be a prolonged one. Nothing more easy, as it appeared, than to catch Flood at his hotel, get a quarter-of-an-hour's conversation with him, hear his advice, and be home again. But a check intervened.

Upon arriving at the London terminus, Mr. Chattaway got into a cab, and drove to the hotel ordinarily used by Mr. Flood. After a dispute with the cab-driver—and Mr. Chattaway was one who generally did have disputes with cab-drivers—he entered the hotel, and asked to see Mr. Flood.

"Mr. Flood?—Mr. Flood?" repeated the waiter whom he had accosted. "There's no gentleman of that name staying here, sir."

"I mean Mr. Flood of Barmester," irritably rejoined the master of Trevlyn Hold. "Perhaps you don't know him personally. He came up this morning an hour or two ago."

The waiter was a fresh one, and did not know Mr. Flood personally. He went to another waiter, and the latter came forward to Mr. Chattaway. But the man's information was correct; Mr. Flood of Barmester had not arrived.

"He travelled by the eight-o'clock train," persisted Mr

Chattaway, as if he found the denial difficult to reconcile with that fact. "He must be in London."

"All I can say, sir, is that he has not come here," returned the head-waiter.

Mr. Chattaway was considerably put out. In his impatience, the delay seemed most irritating. He quitted the hotel, and bent his steps towards Essex Street, where the agents of Mr. Flood lived. Chattaway went in eagerly, fully hoping, and consequently expecting, that the first object his eyes should rest on would be his confidential adviser.

His eyes did not receive that satisfaction. Some clerks were in the room, also one or two persons who appeared to be strangers; clients, probably; but there was no Mr. Flood, and the clerks could give no information of him. One of the firm, a Mr. Newby, appeared and shook hands with Mr. Chattaway, whom he had once or twice seen.

"Flood? Yes. We had a note from Flood yesterday morning, telling us to get some accounts prepared, as he should be in town in the course of a day or two. He has not come yet; be up to-morrow perhaps."

"But he has come," reiterated Chattaway. "I have followed him up to town. I want to see him upon a matter of importance."

"Oh, come, has he?" carelessly replied Mr. Newby, and the indifferent manner appeared almost like an insult to Chattaway in that gentleman's impatient frame of mind. "He'll be in later, then."

"He is sure to come here?" inquired Mr. Chattaway.

"Quite sure. We shall have a good bit of business to transact with him this time."

"Then, if you'll allow me, I'll wait here. I must see him, and I want to get back to Barbrook as soon as possible."

Mr. Chattaway was told that he was welcome to wait, if it pleased him to do so, and a chair was handed him in the entrance room, where the clerks were writing, and he took his seat in it. He sat there until he was well-nigh driven wild with impatience. The room was in a continual bustle; persons constantly coming in and going out. For the first hour or so, to watch the swaying door afforded Chattaway a sort of relief; for in every fresh visitor (until he came into view) he expected to see Mr. Flood. But this grew tedious at last, and the ever-recurring disappointment told upon his temper.

Evening came, the hour for closing the office, and the

country lawyer had not made his appearance. "It is most extraordinary," remarked Chattaway to Mr. Newby.

"He has been about some other business, and couldn't get to us to-day, I suppose," rejoined Mr. Newby, in the most provokingly matter-of-fact tone. "If he has come up for a week, as you say, he must have some important affair on hand; in which case it may be a day or two before he finds his way to us."

A most unsatisfactory conclusion for Mr. Chattaway; but that gentleman was obliged to put up with it, in the absence of any hope more tangible. He went back to the hotel, and there found that Mr. Flood was still among the non-arrivals.

It was bad enough, that day and night's disappointment and suspense for Chattaway; but when it came to be extended over more days and nights, you may judge how it was increased. Mr. Flood did not make his appearance. Chattaway, in a state of fume, divided his time between the hotel, the agents' office in Essex Street, and the Euston Square station, in the wild hope of coming upon the lawyer. All to no purpose. He telegraphed to Barmester, and received for reply that Mr. Flood was in London, and so he redoubled his hauntings at the different expected meeting-places, and worked himself into a fever.

It appeared to him absolutely necessary that he should consult Flood before venturing back to home quarters, where he should inevitably meet that dangerous enemy. But how could he see Flood?—where look for him? Barmester telegraphed up that Mr. Flood was in London; the agents persisted in their assertion that they expected him hourly, each day, at their office, and yet Chattaway could not come upon him. He tore into all the courts open in the long vacation; he prowled about the Temple, about Lincoln's Inn, and other places where lawyers congregated, in the delusive hope that he might by good luck meet with him. All, I say, in vain; and Chattaway had been very nearly a week from home, when his hopes were at length realized. There were other lawyers whom he might have consulted—Mr. Newby himself, for instance—but he shrank from laying bare his dread to a stranger.

He was walking slowly up Ludgate Hill, his hands in his pockets, his brow knit, altogether in a disconsolate manner, some vague intention in his mind of taking a peep inside Doctors' Commons, when, by the merest accident, he happened to turn his eyes on the string of vehicles passing up and down.

In that same moment a cab, extricating itself from the long line, whirled past him in the direction of Fleet Street; and its occupant was Flood the lawyer.

All his listlessness was gone. His eyes starting, Chattaway threw himself into the midst of the crowding carriages, and tore shouting after the cab. The sober foot-passengers thought he had gone mad: but they were bent on their own eager business, and had only time for a wondering glance. Chattaway bore on his way, and succeeded in keeping the cab in view. By the time it stopped at the hotel, to which it turned, and the lawyer had alighted, a portmanteau in hand, and was paying the driver, Chattaway was up with him, breathless, excited, grasping his arm as one demented.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Flood, in astonishment. "You here, Chattaway? Do you want me?"

"I followed you to town by the next train a week ago; I have been looking for you ever since," gasped Chattaway, unable to regain his breath between the race and the excitement. "Where have you been hiding yourself? Your agents have been expecting you all this time."

"I dare say they have. I wrote to say I should be with them in a day or two. I thought I should be, then."

"But where have you been?"

"Over to France. A client wrote to me from Paris——"

"To France!" interrupted Mr. Chattaway in his anger, feeling the announcement as a special and personal grievance. What right had his legal adviser to be dancing his heels in France, when he had been searching for him in London?

"I did not intend to stay," continued Mr. Flood. "I took the express route, *viâ* Folkestone, and meant to return without delay; but when I reached my client, I found the affair on which he wanted me was complicated, and I had to wait the dilatoriness of French lawyers."

"You have been lingering over the seductions of Paris; nothing else," growled Mr. Chattaway.

The lawyer laughed pleasantly. "No, on my honour. I did go about to see some of the sights while I was waiting for my business; but they did not detain me by one unnecessary minute. What is it that you want with me?"

They entered the hotel, and Mr. Chattaway took him into a private room, unwashed and unrefreshed as the traveller was, and laid the case before him: the sudden appearance of the mysterious stranger at Barbrook, his open avowal that he had

come to depose Chattaway from the Hold, and place in it Rupert Trevlyn.

"But who is he?" inquired Mr. Flood.

"A lawyer," was the reply—for you must remember that Mr. Chattaway could only speak in accordance with the supposed facts; the facts as they had been exaggerated to him. "I know nothing more about the man, except that he avows he has come to Barbrook to deprive me of my property, and take up the cause of Rupert Trevlyn. But he can't do it, you know, Flood. The Hold is mine, and must remain mine."

"Of course he can't," acquiesced the lawyer. "Why need you put yourself out about it?"

Mr. Chattaway was wiping the moisture from his face. The words, "But he can't do it, you know, Flood," had been spoken more as a question, suggested by his fears, than as an assertion of his belief. He sat looking at the lawyer.

"I can't deny that it has troubled me," he said: "that it is troubling me still. What would my family do—my children—if we were turned from the Hold?"

It was the lawyer's turn to look. He could not make out Chattaway. No power on earth, so far as his belief and knowledge went, could wrest Trevlyn Hold from its present master. Why, then, these fears? Were they born of nervousness? But Chattaway was not a nervous man.

"Trevlyn Hold is as much yours as this hat"—touching the one at his elbow—"is mine," he resumed. "It came to you by legal bequest; you have enjoyed it these twenty years, and to deprive you of it is beyond human power. Unless," he added, after a pause, "unless indeed——"

"Unless what?" eagerly interrupted Mr. Chattaway, his heart thumping against his side.

"Unless—it was only an idea that crossed me—there should prove to be a flaw in Squire Trevlyn's will. But that's not probable."

"It's impossible," gasped Chattaway, his fears, in defiance of the words, taking a new and startling turn. "It's impossible that there could have been anything defective in the will, Flood."

"It's next to impossible," acquiesced the lawyer; "though such mistakes have been known. Who drew it up?"

"The Squire's solicitors, Peterby and Jones."

"Then it's all right, you may be sure. Peterby and Jones are not men likely to insert errors in their deeds. I should not trouble myself about the matter."

Mr. Chattaway sat in silence, revolving many things. How he wished he *could* take the advice and not "trouble himself" about the matter! "What made you think there might be a flaw in the will?" he presently asked.

"Nay, I did not think there was: the train of thought led me to the idea that there might be; that was all. When a case is offered to me for consideration," continued Mr. Flood, "it is my habit to glance at it in all its bearings. You tell me that a stranger has made his appearance at Barbrook, avowing an intention of displacing you from Trevlyn Hold in favour of Rupert Trevlyn?"

"Well?"

"Well, then, I instantly, whilst you were speaking, began to grasp that case, to turn it about in my mind; and I see that there is no possible way by which you can be displaced, so far as I know and believe. You enjoy it in accordance with Squire Trevlyn's will, and so long as that will remains in force, you are safe—provided the will has no flaw in it."

"Why should you think it has a flaw in it?" reiterated Mr. Chattaway.

"I don't think it. I don't fear it. I only mentioned it as the remotest possible solution—the only ground of pretence for the manner in which you tell me this man is acting. I make no doubt that the will is what it has always been supposed to be—perfectly legal; and that the stranger's expressed intention will turn out to be all moonshine."

Mr. Chattaway sat biting his lips. His own opinion had always been (and, it may be said, was in contradistinction to that great dread ever hidden in his heart) that he was safe under the will and through the will. Never for a moment in the wildest flight of fear had he given a glance to the possibility that the will could be illegal. On that will he had relied, however dark and vague his fears had seemed: it had been his sheet-anchor. The idea, therefore, now suggested by Mr. Flood was perhaps the most alarming that could have been presented to him.

"If there were any flaw in the will," he began—and the very mention of the cruel words almost rent his heart in two—"could you detect it, by reading the will over?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Flood.

"Then let us go at once, and set this awful uncertainty at rest."

He had risen from his seat so eagerly and hastily that Mr. Flood scarcely understood. "Go where?" he asked,

"To Doctors' Commons. We can see it there by paying a shilling."

"Oh—ay. I'll go if you like. But I must have a wash first, and a mouthful of refreshment. I have had neither since leaving Boulogne, and the crossing—ugh! I don't want to think of it."

Mr. Chattaway controlled his impatience in the best manner he was able. He went out and called a cab to the door, and took his place in it before Mr. Flood was ready—which would, in all probability, entail one of Mr. Chattaway's favourite disputes with the driver when they should arrive at their destination. At length they were fairly on their way—to the very spot for which Mr. Chattaway had been making once before that morning.

Difficulties surmounted, including the cabman, Mr. Flood was soon deep in the perusal of Squire Trevlyn's will. He read it over slowly and thoughtfully, his eyes and head bent, his whole attention absorbed in the task. At its conclusion, he turned and looked full at Mr. Chattaway.

"You are perfectly safe," he said. "The will is right and legal in every point."

The relief brought a glow into Chattaway's dusky face. "I thought it strange if it could be wrong," he cried, drawing a deep breath.

"It is only the codicil, you see, which affects you," continued Mr. Flood, pointing to the deed before them. "The will appears to have been made years before the codicil, and leaves the estate to the eldest son Rupert, and failing him, to Joseph. Rupert died; Joe died; and then the codicil was drawn up, willing it to you. You come in, you see, *after* the two sons; contingent on their death; no mention whatever is made of the child Rupert."

Chattaway coughed. He did not deem it necessary to repeat that Squire Trevlyn had never known that the child Rupert was in existence: but Mr. Flood was, no doubt, aware of that fact.

"It's a good thing for you that Joe Trevlyn died before his father," carelessly remarked Mr. Flood, as he glanced again at the will.

"Why?" cried Chattaway.

"Because, had he not, this codicil would be valueless," explained the lawyer. "It is——"

"But he was dead, and it gives the estate to me," fiercely interrupted Chattaway, going into a white heat again.

"Yes, yes. But it was a good thing, I say, for you. Had Joe been alive, he would have come in, in spite of this codicil; and he could have bequeathed the property to his boy after him."

"Do you suppose I don't know all that?" retorted Chattaway. "It was only in consequence of Joe Trevlyn's death that the estate was willed to me. Had he lived, I never should have had it, or expected it."

The peevish tone of his voice betrayed how sore was the subject altogether, and Mr. Flood smiled. "You need not be cross over it, Chattaway," he said; "there's no cause for that. And now you may go home to the Hold in peace, without having your sleep disturbed by dreams of ejection. And if that unknown friend of yours should happen to mention in your hearing his kind intention of deposing you for Rupert Trevlyn, tell him, with my compliments, to come up here and read Squire Trevlyn's will."

Partially reassured, if not entirely satisfied, Mr. Chattaway lost little time in taking his departure from London. He quitted it that same afternoon, and arrived at Barbrook terminus just after dark, whence he started for the Hold.

But he did not proceed to it as most other travellers in his rank of life would have done. He did not call a fly and drive to it; he preferred to go on foot. He did not even walk openly along the broad highway, but turned into the by-paths, where he might be pretty sure of not meeting a soul, and stole cautiously along, peering on all sides, as if he were looking out for something he either longed or dreaded to see.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WELCOME HOME.

Was there a fate upon the master of Trevlyn Hold?—was he never to be at rest?—could not even one little respite be allowed him in this, the first hour of his return home? It seemed not. He was turning into the first of those fields you have so often heard of, next to the one which had been the scene of poor Mr. Ryle's unhappy end, when a tall man suddenly pounced upon him, came to a standstill, and spoke.

"I believe I am not mistaking in supposing that I address Mr. Chattaway?"

In his panic Mr. Chattaway nearly dropped a small parcel which he held. An utter fear had taken possession of him, even to the loss of his self-possession: for in the speaker he recognized that dreaded enemy; that man who had proclaimed that he was about to work evil against him. It seemed like a terrible omen, the meeting him in this, the first moment of his arrival.

"I have been wishing to see you for some days past," continued the stranger, "and have been to the Hold three or four times to ask if you had come home. I was a friend of the late Joe Trevlyn's. I am a friend now of his son."

"Yes," stammered Chattaway—for in his great fear he did not follow his first impulse, which had been to meet the words with a torrent of anger. "May I ask what it is you want with me?"

"I wish to converse with you upon the subject of Rupert Trevlyn. I would endeavour to impress upon your notice the grievous wrong inflicted upon him in keeping him out of the Hold—the property of his forefathers. I do not think you can ever have reflected properly upon the matter, Mr. Chattaway, or can have looked upon it in its true light—otherwise you would surely never deprive him of what is so indisputably his."

Mr. Chattaway, his fears taking deeper and deeper possession of him, had turned into the field, in the hope of walking away from the stranger. In any direction, no matter what, so that he could get rid of him—for what to answer he did not know. It must be conciliation or defiance; but he could not decide in that hurried moment which would be the better policy. The stranger also turned and kept up with him.

"My name is Daw, Mr. Chattaway. You may possibly remember it, for I had the honour of a little correspondence with you about the time of Mrs. Trevlyn's death. It was I who transmitted to you the account of the birth of the boy Rupert. I am now informed that that fact was not suffered to reach the ears of Squire Trevlyn."

"I wish to hear nothing about it, sir; I desire to hold no communication with you at all," cried Mr. Chattaway, bearing on his way.

"But it may be better for you that you should do so, and I ask it in courtesy," persisted Mr. Daw, striding beside him. "Appoint your own time and place, and I will wait upon you,

These things are always better settled amicably than the reverse: litigation generally brings a host of evil in its train; and Rupert Trevlyn has no money to risk in it. Not but that his costs could come out of the estate," equably concluded Mr. Daw.

The master of Trevlyn Hold turned passionately round, arresting his course for an instant. "Litigation! what do you mean? How dare you speak to me in this manner? Who but a footpad would accost a gentleman by night, as you are accosting me?"

The discourteous thrust did not seem to put out Mr. Daw. "I only wish you to appoint a time to see me—at your own home, or anywhere else you may please," he reiterated, not losing his good manners. "But I am not to be balked in this, Mr. Chattaway. I have taken up the cause of Rupert Trevlyn, and I shall try and carry it through."

A blaze of anger burst from Mr. Chattaway. His words, his tones, were alike fiercely passionate, and Mr. Daw turned away. "I will see you when you are in a reasonable mood," he said. "To-morrow I will call at the Hold, and I hope you will meet me more amicably than you have done to-night."

"I will never meet you; I will never see or listen to you," retorted Mr. Chattaway, his anger mastering him and causing him to forget prudence. "If you want to know by what right I retain the Hold over the boy, Rupert Trevlyn, go and consult Squire Trevlyn's will. There! That is the only answer you will get from me."

Panting with the anger he could not restrain, Mr. Chattaway stood and watched the calm, retreating steps of the stranger, and then turned his own in the direction of home; unconscious that he in his turn was also watched, and by two who were very close to him—George Ryle and Maude Trevlyn.

They—as you remember—proceeded immediately to Trevlyn Farm; and words were spoken between them which no time could efface. Impulsive words, telling of the love that had long lain in the heart of each, almost as suppressed, quite as deep, as the great dread which had made the skeleton in Mr. Chattaway's.

The hilarity of the evening had made much progress, as they found on entering. The company were seated round the table eating the good things, and evidently enjoying themselves heartily. The parlour-door was crowded with merry faces,

Mrs. Ryle and others were at one end of the large room: but George steered Maude direct to the parlour; and the group round its door made way for her, and welcomed her noisily.

But there came no smile to the face of Octave Chattaway. Pushing her way through the rest with a severe eye and stern tone, she confronted Maude. Her lips were drawn with anger.

"Maude Trevlyn, what do you do here? How dare you come?"

"Is there any harm in it, Octave?"

"Yes, there is," said Miss Chattaway, with flashing eyes. "There is harm because I desired that you would not come. A pretty thing for Mrs. Ryle to be invaded by half-a-dozen of us! Have you no sense of propriety?"

"Not a bit of it," gaily interrupted George. "No one understands that in connection with a harvest-home. I have been to the Hold for Miss Maude, Octave; and I should have brought Edith and Emily, but they were in bed."

"In bed!" exclaimed Caroline Ryle, in surprise.

"Having retired to it in mortification and tears at being excluded from the delights of a harvest-home," continued George, with mock gravity. "Miss Chattaway had preached propriety to them, and they could only bow to it. We must manage things better another time."

Octave's cheeks burnt. Was George Ryle speaking this in ridicule?—ridicule of her? To stand well with him, she would have risked much.

"They are better at home," she quietly said: "and I have no doubt Mrs. Ryle thinks so. Two of us are enough to come. Quite enough, in my opinion," she pointedly added, turning a reproving look on Maude. "I am surprised that you should have intruded——"

"Blame me, if you please, Miss Chattaway—if you deem that blame is due anywhere," interrupted George. "I have a will of my own, you know, and I took possession of Miss Maude and brought her, whether she would or no."

Octave pushed her hair back with an impatient movement. Her eyes fell before his; her voice, as she addressed him, turned to softness. George was not a vain man; but it was next to impossible to mistake these signs; though neither by word nor look would he give the faintest colouring of hope to them. If Octave could only have read the indifference at his heart! nay, more—his positive dislike!

"Did you see anything of Rupert, George?" she asked, recalling his attention to herself.

"I saw nothing of any one but Maude. I might have laid hands on all I found; but there was no one to meet, Maude excepted. What makes you so cross about it, Octave?"

She laughed pleasantly. "I am not cross. George," she added, in lower tones, "sometimes I think you do not understand me. You seem to——"

Octave's words died away. Coming in at the door was the tall, conspicuous form of the parsonage guest, Mr. Daw. Maude was just then standing apart, and he went deliberately up to her and kissed her forehead.

Startled and resentful, a half-cry escaped her lips, and she turned instinctively towards George. But Mr. Daw laid his hand gently on her arm.

"My dear young lady, I may almost claim that as a right. I believe I was the first person, except your mother, who ever pressed a kiss upon your little face. Do you know me?"

Maude faltered in her answer. His appearance and salutation had been altogether so sudden, that she was taken by surprise; but she did not fail to recognize him now. Yet she hesitated to acknowledge that she knew him, on account of the presence of Octave Chattaway. Rupert had told her all about the stranger; but it might be inconvenient to say so much to an inmate of Trevlyn Hold.

"It was I who christened you," he resumed. "It was I who promised your father to—to sometimes watch over you. But I could not keep my promise; circumstances worked against it. And now that I am brought for a short time into the same neighbourhood that you inhabit, I may not call to see you."

"Why not?" exclaimed Maude, wondering much.

"Because those who are your guardians deny it to me. I went to the Hold and asked for you, and then became aware that in doing so I had committed something like a crime, or what was looked upon as one. Should Rupert, your brother, regain possession of his father's inheritance and his father's home, then, perhaps, I may be a more welcome visitor to it."

The room stood in consternation. To some of them, at any rate, these words were new; to the ears of Octave Chattaway they were tainted with the darkest treason. Octave had never heard aught of this bold stranger's business at Barbrook, and she gazed at him with defiant eyes and lips apart.

"Were you alluding to the Hold, sir?" she asked in a cold, hard voice, which might have been taken for Chattaway's own.

"I was. The Hold was the inheritance of Rupert Trevlyn's father: it ought to be that of Rupert."

"The Hold is the inheritance of my father," haughtily spoke Octave. "Is he mad?" she added in a half-whisper, turning to George.

"Hush, Octave. No."

It was not a pleasant or even an appropriate theme to be spoken of in the presence of Mr. Chattaway's daughters. George Ryle, at any rate, thought so, and he was glad that a burst of rustic merriment, so loud as to drown everything else for a time, came overpoweringly at that moment from the feasting in the other room.

Under cover of the noise, Octave approached Nora. Nora immediately drew an apple-pie before her, and began to cut unlimited helpings from it, pretending to be absorbed by her work. She had not the least inclination for a private interview with Miss Chattaway. Miss Chattaway was one, however, not easily repulsed.

"Nora, tell me—who is that man, and what brings him here?"

"What man, Miss Chattaway?" asked Nora, indifferently, unable quite to help herself. "Ann Canham, how many are there to serve with pie still?"

"*That* man. That bold, bad man who has been speaking so strangely."

"Does he speak strangely?" retorted Nora. "His voice is gruff certainly. And what a lot of plum-pudding he is eating! He is our young master's new waggoner, Miss Chattaway."

"Not *he!*" shrieked Octave, in her anger "Do you suppose I concern myself with those stuffing clodhoppers? I speak of that tall, strange man amongst the guests."

"Oh, he!" said Nora, carelessly glancing over her shoulder. "Nanny, here's plenty of pie if it's wanted. What about him, Miss Chattaway?"

"I asked you who he was, and what brought him here."

"Then you had better ask it of himself, Miss Chattaway. He goes about with a red umbrella; and that's about all I know of him for certain."

"Why does Mrs. Ryle invite suspicious characters to her house?"

"Suspicious characters! Is he one? Meg Sanders, if you

let Jim cram himself with pie in that style, you'll have something to do to get him home. He is stopping at the parsonage, Miss Chattaway; an acquaintance of Mr. Freeman's. I suppose they brought him here to-night out of politeness; it wouldn't have been good manners to leave him at home. He is an old friend of the Trevlyns, I hear; has always believed, until now, that Master Rupert enjoyed the Hold—can't be brought to believe that he doesn't. It is a state of things that does sound odd to a stranger, you know."

Octave might rest assured that she would not get the best of it with Nora. She turned away with a displeased gesture, and regained the sitting-room, where refreshments for Mrs. Ryle's friends were now being laid. But somehow the sunshine of the evening had gone out for her. What had run away with it? The ominous words of the stranger? No; the worst sentiment that Octave cast to *them* was contempt. It was George Ryle's unsatisfactory manner that vexed her: unsatisfactory, because so intensely calm and equable. And those calm, matter-of-fact manners, in one beloved, tell sorely upon the heart.

The evening passed, and it grew time to leave. Cris Chattaway and Rupert had come in, and they all set off in a body to Trevlyn Hold—those who had to go there. George went out with them.

"Are you coming?" asked Octave.

"Yes, part of the way"

So Octave stood, ready to take his arm, never supposing that he would not offer it; and her pulses began to beat. But he turned round as if waiting for something, and Octave could only walk on a few steps. Soon she heard him coming up with a brisk step, and she turned to him. And then her heart seemed to stand still and bound on again with fiery speed, and a flush of anger dyed her brow. He had taken Maude on his arm!

"Oh, George, do not let Maude trouble you," she exclaimed. "Cris will take care of her. Cris, come and relieve George of Maude Trevlyn."

"Thank you, Octave; it's no trouble," replied George, his tone one of indifference. "As I brought Maude out, it is only fair that I should take her home—the task falls to me, you see."

Octave did not see it at all, and she pursued her way sullenly and resentfully; something very like hatred for Maude taking possession of her breast. It is not pleasant to write of

these things, especially when they may be looked upon as somewhat misplaced; but I know of few histories in which they can be quite avoided, if the whole truth is adhered to, for many and evil are the passions assailing the undisciplined human heart.

"Good-bye!" George whispered to Maude as he left her. "This night begins a new era in our lives."

The Hold was busy when they entered it. Mrs. Chattaway and her sister had just returned from Barmester, and were greeted by Mr. Chattaway. They had expected him for so many days past, and been disappointed, that his appearance now brought surprise with it. He answered the questions evasively put to him by Mrs. Chattaway and Diana, as to where he had been. Business had kept him, was all they could obtain.

"I cannot think what you have done for clothes, James," said Mrs. Chattaway.

"I have done very well," he retorted. "I bought what I wanted."

But it was not upon the score of his wardrobe, or what had kept him so long, that Miss Diana Trevlyn required speech of Chattaway. She had been waiting all that time, since the first morning of his absence, for information on a certain point, and she now demanded it in a peremptory manner.

"Chattaway," she began, when the rest had dispersed, and she waited with him, "I have had a strange communication made to me. In that past time—carry your thoughts back to it, if you please—when there came to this house the news of Rupert Trevlyn's birth and his mother's death—do you remember it?"

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Chattaway. "What should hinder me?"

"The tidings were conveyed by letter. Two letters came, the second a day after the first."

"Well?" returned Mr. Chattaway, believing the theme, in some shape or other, was to haunt him for ever. "What of the letters?"

"In that last letter, which must have been a heavy one, there was a communication enclosed for me."

"I don't remember it," said Mr. Chattaway.

"It was no doubt there. A document written at the request of Mrs. Trevlyn; constituting me guardian to the two children. What did you do with it?"

"I?" returned Chattaway, and he spoke with apparent surprise, and looked full at Miss Diana with an unmoved face. "I did nothing with it. I don't know anything about it."

"You must have taken it out and suppressed it," observed Miss Diana.

"I never saw it or heard of it," obstinately persisted Chattaway. "Why should I? You might have been their appointed guardian, and welcome, for me: you have chiefly acted as guardian. I tell you, Diana, I neither saw it nor heard of it: you need not look so suspiciously at me."

"Is he telling the truth?" thought Miss Diana, and her keen eyes were not lifted from Mr. Chattaway's face. But that gentleman was remarkably inscrutable, and never appeared more so than at this moment.

"If he did *not* do anything with it," continued Miss Diana in her train of thought, "what could have become of the thing? Where can it be?"

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. CHATTAWAY COME TO GRIEF.

A FEW days passed on, and strange rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood. Various rumours, vague at the best; but all tending to one point—that the true heir was coming to his own again. They penetrated even to the ears of Mr. Chattaway, throwing that gentleman into a state not to be described. Some said a later will of the Squire's had been found; some said a will of Joe Trevlyn's; some that it was now discovered the estate could only descend in the direct male line, and that consequently it had been Rupert's all along. Chattaway was in a raging fever; it preyed upon him, and turned his days to darkness. He seemed to look upon Rupert with the most intense suspicion, as if it were from him alone—from his plotting and working, you understand—that the evil would come. He feared to trust him out of his sight; to leave him alone for a single instant. When he went to Blackstone he took Rupert with him; he hovered about there all day, keeping Rupert in sight, and he brought him back in the evening. Miss Diana had not yet bought the pony she spoke of for Rupert's use, and Chattaway either mounted him

on an old horse that was good for little now, and rode by his side, or else drove him over. Rupert was intensely puzzled at this new consideration for him, and could not make it out.

One morning Mr. Chattaway so far sacrificed his own ease as to contemplate walking over. The horses were wanted that day, and he told Rupert they would walk. "Very well," Rupert answered, in his half-careless, half-obedient fashion, "it was all the same to him." And so they started. But as they were going down the avenue a gentleman was discerned coming up it. Mr. Chattaway knitted his brows and peered at him; his sight for a distance was not quite so good as it had been.

"Who's this?" asked he of Rupert.

"It is Mr. Peterby," replied Rupert.

"Mr. Peterby!" ejaculated Chattaway. "What Peterby?"

"Peterby of Barmester, the lawyer," explained Rupert, wondering that there was any need to ask.

For only one gentleman of the name of Peterby was known to Trevlyn Hold, and Mr. Chattaway was, so to say, familiar with him. He had been solicitor to Squire Trevlyn, and though Mr. Chattaway had not continued him in that post when he succeeded to the estate, preferring to employ Mr. Flood, he yet knew him well. His ejaculation, "What Peterby?" had not escaped him so much in doubt as to the man, but as to what he could want with him. But Mr. Peterby was solicitor for some of his tenants, and he supposed some business might be arising touching the renewal of leases.

They met. Mr. Peterby was an active little man of more than sixty years, with a healthy colour in his face, and the remains of auburn hair. He had walked all the way from Barmester, and enjoyed the walk as much as a schoolboy. "Good morning, Mr. Chattaway," he said, holding out his hand, "I am fortunate to meet you. I came early, to catch you before you went to Blackstone. Can you give me half-an-hour's interview?"

Mr. Chattaway thought he should not like to give the interview. He was in a bad temper, in no mood for business, and he really wanted to be at Blackstone. Besides all that, he had no love for Mr. Peterby. "I am pressed for time this morning," he replied, "am much later than I ought to have been. Is it anything particular that you want me for?"

"Yes, it is; very particular," was the answer, delivered in

an uncompromising tone. "I must request you to accord me the interview, Mr. Chattaway."

Mr. Chattaway turned back to the house with his visitor. He marshalled him into the drawing-room, and Rupert remained whistling at the hall-door.

"I have come upon a curious errand, Mr. Chattaway, and no doubt an unwelcome one; though, from what I hear, it may not be altogether unexpected," began the gentleman, as they took seats opposite each other. "A question has been arising of late, whether Rupert Trevlyn may not possess some right to the Hold. I am here to demand of you if you will give it up to him."

Was the world coming to an end? Chattaway thought it must be. He sat and stared at the speaker as if he were in a dream. Was *every one* turning against him? Was the awful thing coming publicly upon him, without disguise? He rubbed his handkerchief over his hot face, and imperiously demanded of Mr. Peterby what on earth he meant, and where he could have picked up his insolence.

"I am not about to wrest the estate from you, Mr. Chattaway, or to threaten to do so," was the answer. "You need not fear that. But—you must be aware that you have for the last twenty years enjoyed a position that ought in strict justice to belong to the grandson of Squire Trevlyn."

"I am not aware of anything of the sort," groaned Chattaway. "What do you mean by 'wresting the estate?'"

"Softly, my good sir; there's no need to put yourself out with me. I am come on a straightforward, peaceable errand; not one of war. A friendly errand, if you will allow me so to express myself."

The master of Trevelyn Hold could only marvel at the speech. A friendly errand! requiring him to give up his possessions!

Mr. Peterby proceeded to explain; and as there is no time to give the interview in detail, the explanation shall be condensed. It appeared that the Reverend Mr. Daw had in his zeal sought out the solicitors of the late Squire Trevlyn. He had succeeded in impressing upon them a sense of the great injustice dealt out to Rupert; had avowed his intention of endeavouring, by any means in his power, to remedy this injustice; but at this point he had been somewhat obscure, and had, in fact, caused (perhaps inadvertently) the lawyers to imagine that this power was something real and tangible.

Could there be (they asked themselves afterwards) any late will of Squire Trevlyn's which would supersede the old one? It was the only hinge on which the matter could turn; and Mr. Daw's mysterious hints certainly encouraged the thought. But he, Mr. Daw, had said, "Perhaps Chattaway will give up amicably, if you urge it upon him," and Mr. Peterby had now come for that purpose.

"But what you say is utterly absurd," urged Chattaway; the long explanation, which Mr. Peterby had given in an open and candid manner, having afforded him time to recover somewhat of his fears and his temper. "I can take upon myself most positively to assert that there was no will or codicil made, or attempted to be made, by Squire Trevlyn, subsequent to the one on which I inherit. Your house drew that up."

"I know we did," replied the lawyer. "But that does not prove that none was drawn up after it."

"But I tell you that there was not any. I am certain upon the point."

"Well, it was the only conclusion we could come to," rejoined Mr. Peterby. "This Mr. Daw must have some grounds for urging the thing on; he wouldn't be so stupid as to do so if he had none."

"He has none," said Chattaway.

"Ah, but I am sure he has. But for being convinced of this, do you suppose I should have come to you now, asking you to give up an estate which you have so long enjoyed? I assure you I came as much in your interests as in his. If there is anything a-gate by which you can be disturbed, it is only fair that you should know of it."

Fair! In Mr. Chattaway's frame of mind, he could scarcely tell what was fair and what was not fair. The interview was prolonged, but it brought forth no satisfactory conclusion. Perhaps one could not be expected from it. Mr. Peterby took his departure, fully impressed with the conviction that the present owner of Trevlyn Hold would retain possession to the end, would contest it inch by inch; and as he walked down the avenue he asked himself whether he had not been induced to enter upon a foolish errand, in coming to suggest that it should be voluntarily resigned.

The master of Trevlyn Hold watched him away, and then opened the breakfast-room door. "Where's Rupert?" he inquired, not seeing Rupert there.

"Rupert?" answered Mrs. Chattaway, looking up. "I

think he has gone to Blackstone. He wished me good morning; and I saw him walk down the avenue."

All things seemed to be against Mr. Chattaway. Here was Rupert out of sight now; it was hard to say where he might have gone, or what mischief he might be in. As he turned from the door, Cris Chattaway's horse—the unlucky new one which had damaged the dog-cart—was brought up, and Cris appeared, prepared to mount him.

"Where are you going, Cris?"

"Nowhere in particular this morning," answered Cris. "I have a nasty headache, and a canter may take it away."

"Then I'll ride your horse to Blackstone, if you don't want him," returned Mr. Chattaway. "Alter the stirrups, Sam."

"Why, where's your own horse?" cried Cris, with a very blank look.

"In the stable," shortly returned Mr. Chattaway.

He mounted the horse and rode away, his many cares perplexing him. A hideous wall separating him from all good fortune seemed to be rising up round about him; and the catastrophe he so dreaded—a contest between himself and Rupert Trevlyn for possession of the Hold—appeared to be drawing within the range of probability. In the gloomy prospect before him, only one loophole of escape presented itself to his imagination—the death of Rupert.

But you must not think worse of Mr. Chattaway than he deserves. He did not deliberately contemplate any such calamity; he did not set himself to hope for it. The imagination is rebelliously evil, often uncontrollable; and the thought rose up unbidden and unwished for. Mr. Chattaway could not help it; he could not at first drive it away again; the somewhat dangerous argument, "Were Rupert dead I should be safe, and it is the only means by which I can feel assured of safety," did linger with him longer than was expedient: but he never for one moment contemplated the possibility as likely to take place; most certainly it never occurred to him that he could be accessory to it. Though not a good man, especially in the way of temper and covetousness, Mr. Chattaway would have started with horror from himself had he supposed he could ever be so bad as that.

He rode swiftly along in the charming autumn morning, urging his horse to a hard gallop. Was his haste merely caused by his anxiety to be at Blackstone, or that he would escape from his own thoughts? He rode directly to the coal

mine, up to the mouth of the pit. Two or three men, looking like blackamoors, were standing about there.

"Why are you not down at work?" angrily demanded Mr. Chattaway. "What do you do idling here!"

They had been waiting for Pennet, the men replied. But word had just been brought that Pennet was not coming.

"Where is he?" asked Mr. Chattaway. "Skulking again?"

"I dunna think he be skulking, sir," was the reply of one. "He be bad a-bed."

An angry frown darkened Mr. Chattaway's countenance. Truth to say, this man, Pennet, though a valuable workman from his great strength, his perseverance when in the pit, did occasionally absent himself from it, to the wrath of his overseers; and Mr. Chattaway knew that the words "bad a-bed" might be only an excuse for taking a holiday in the drinking shop.

"I'll soon see that," he cried. "Bring that horse back. If Pennet is skulking, I'll discharge him this very day."

He had despatched his horse round to the stable by a man; but he now mounted him again, and was riding away, after ordering the men down to their work, when he stopped to ask a question respecting one of his overseers.

"Is Bean down the shaft?"

No; the men thought not. They believed he was round at the office.

Mr. Chattaway turned his horse's head towards the office, and galloped off, reining in at the door. The clerk Ford and Rupert Trevlyn both came out.

"Oh, so you have got here!" ungraciously grunted Mr. Chattaway to Rupert. "I want Bean."

"Bean's in the pit, sir," replied Ford.

"The man told me he was not in the pit," returned Mr. Chattaway. "They said he was here."

"Then they knew nothing about it," observed Ford. "Bean has been down in the pit all the morning."

Mr. Chattaway turned to Rupert. "You go down the shaft and tell Bean to come up. I want him."

He rode off as he spoke, and Rupert departed for the pit. The man Pennet lived in a hovel, one of many, about a mile and a half away. Chattaway, between haste and temper, was in a heat when he arrived. A masculine-looking woman with tangled hair came out to salute him.

"Where's Pennet?"

"He's right bad, master."

Mr. Chattaway's lip curled. "Bad from drink?"

"No," replied the woman, defiantly; for the owner of the mine was held in no favour, and this woman was of too independent a nature to conceal her sentiments when provoked. "Bad from rheumatiz."

He got off his horse, rudely pushed her aside, and went in. Pennet was dressed, but was lying on a wooden settle, as the benches were called in that district.

"I be too bad for the pit to-day, sir; I be, indeed. This rheumatiz have been a-flying about me for weeks; and now it's a-settled in my loins, and I can't stir."

"Let's see you walk," responded Mr. Chattaway.

Pennet got off the bench, it seemed with difficulty, and walked across the brick floor slowly, his arms behind him.

"I thought so," said Mr. Chattaway. "I knew you were skulking. You are as well able to walk as I am. Be off to the pit."

The man lifted his face. "If you was in the pain I be, master, you wouldn't say so. I mote drag myself down to 'im, but I couldn't work."

"We will see that," said Mr. Chattaway, in his determined manner. "You'll work to-day, my man, or you'll never work again for me: so you may take your choice."

There was a pause. Pennet looked irresolute, the woman bitter. Perhaps what these people hated most of all in Chattaway was his personal interference, his petty tyranny. What he was doing now—looking up the hands—was the work of an overseer; not of the owner.

"Come," he authoritatively repeated. "I shall see you start before me. We are too busy for half of you to be basking in idleness. Are you going, Pennet? You work to-day, or you leave the pit, just which you please."

The man glanced at his children—a ragged little group, cowering in silence in a corner, awed by the presence of the master; took his cap without a word, and limped slowly away, though apparently scarcely able to drag one foot before the other.

"Where be your bowels of compassion?" cried the woman, in her audacity, placing herself before Mr. Chattaway.

"I know where my whip will be if you don't get out of my way and change your tone," was his answer. "What do you mean, woman, by speaking so to me?"

"Them as have no compassion for their men, but treads 'em down like so many beasts o' burden, may come, perhaps, to be treaded down themselves," was the woman's retort, as she withdrew out of Mr. Chattaway's vicinity.

He made no answer, except that he lifted his whip significantly. As he rode off, he saw Pennet pursuing his way to the mine by the nearest path—one inaccessible to horses. When he was parallel with the man, he lifted his whip as significantly at him as he had done at the wife, and then urged his horse to a gallop. It was a busy day with them, both in the office and in the mine; and Chattaway, taking as you perceive a somewhat practical part in his affairs, had wished to be present some two hours before. Consequently, these delays had not improved his temper.

About midway between the Pennets' hut and the mine, were the decaying walls of what had once been a shed. Part of the wall was still standing, about breast high. It lay right in Mr. Chattaway's way: one single minute given to turning either to the right or the left, and he would have avoided it. But he saw no reason for avoiding it: he had leaped it often: it was not likely that he would in his hurry turn from it now.

He urged his horse to it, and the animal was in the very act of taking the leap, when a sudden obstacle interposed. A beggar man, who had been quietly ensconced on the other side, basking in the sun and eating his dinner, heard the movement, and not wishing to be run over or leaped upon, started up to fly from danger. The movement, so close and sudden, startled the horse, causing him to strike the wall instead of clearing it: he fell, and his master with him.

The horse was not hurt, and soon found its legs. If the animal had misbehaved himself a few days previously, under the hands of Mr. Cris, he appeared determined to redeem his character now. He stood patient and silent, turning his head to Mr. Chattaway, as if waiting for him to get up.

Which that gentleman strove to do. But he found he could not. Something was the matter with one of his ankles, and he was in a towering passion. The offending beggar scuttered off, frightened at his unbounded rage, his threats of vengeance.

The intemperate words of passion did him no good; you may be very sure of that; they never do any one good. For more than an hour Mr. Chattaway lay there, his horse patiently standing by him, and no one coming to his aid. It would have seemed to him that he lay three times as long, but that he

had his watch, and could consult it as often as he pleased. It was an unfrequented by-road, leading nowhere in particular, except to the hovels; and Mr. Chattaway had therefore full benefit of the solitude.

The first person to come up was no other than Mrs. Pennet —Mogg Pennet, as she was familiarly called. Her tall, gaunt form came striding along, and her large eyes grew larger as she saw who was lying there.

"Ah, master! what's it your turn a'ready! Have you been there ever sin'? Can't you get up?"

"Find assistance," he cried in a curt tone of authority. "Mount my horse sideways, and you'll go the quicker."

"Na, na; I mount na horse. The brute might be a-flinging me, as it seems he ha' flinged you. Women and horses be best apart. Shall I help you up?"

His haughty, ill-conditioned spirit would have prompted him to say "No;" his helplessness and impatience obliged him to say "Yes." The powerful woman took him by the shoulders and raised him. So far, so good. But his ankle gave him intense pain; was, in short, almost useless; and a cry escaped him. In his agony, he flung her rudely from him with his elbow. "Go and get assistance, woman."

"Be that'n the thanks I get? Ah! it be coming home to ye, be it! Ye sent my man off to work in pain; he couldn't hardly crawl, he couldn't: how d'you like pain yerself? If the leg's broke, Squire, you'll ha' time to lie and think on't."

She strode on, Mr. Chattaway sending an ugly word after her, and soon came in sight of the mine—which appeared to be in an unusual bustle. A crowd was collected round the mouth of the pit, and people were running to it from all quarters. Loud talking, gesticulating, confusion prevailed: what could be the cause of it?

"Happen they be looking for him as is lying yonder!" quoth she. But scarcely were the words out of her mouth when a group of women running, frantically throwing their arms up, filling the air with their cries and lamentations, came in sight. Her coarse face grew white and her heart turned sick as the fatal truth burst upon her conviction. There had been an accident in the mine!

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHO WAS DOWN THE SHAFT?

It was only too true. Whether from fire-damp, the rushing in of water, or some other cause of mischief to which coal-pits are liable, was as yet scarcely known: nothing was certain except the terrible calamity itself. Of the men who had gone down the mine that morning, some were dead, others dying. Mogg Pennet echoed the shrieks of the women as she flew forward and pushed herself through the crowd collected round the mouth of the pit. The same confusion prevailed there that prevails in similar scenes of distress and disaster elsewhere.

"And Mr. Chattaway himself was down the shaft, you say? He went down this morning? My friends, it is altogether an awful calamity."

The woman pushed in yet further and confronted the speaker, with her white face, its lips drawn with mental anguish. He was the minister of a dissenting chapel near, a Mr. Lloyd, and was well known to the miners, some of whom went regularly to hear him preach.

"No, sir; Chattaway was na down the shaft; he is na one of the dead, more luck to him," she said, her words brought out brokenly, her bosom heaving. "Chattaway have this morning made me a widda and my young children fatherless. My man was stiff with rheumatiz, he was—no more fit to go to work nor I be to go down that shaft and carry up his poor murdered body. I knowed his errand as soon as I heerd his horse's feet. He made him get off the settle, and he druv him out to work as he'd drive a dog; and when I told him of his hardness, he lifted up his whip agin me. Yes! Pennet's down with the rest of 'em; sent by him: and I be a lone widda."

"Her says right," interposed a voice, breaking the pause which the words had caused. "It wasn't the master as went down the shaft; it were young Rupert Trevlyn."

"Rupert Trevlyn," uttered the minister in startled tones. "I hope he is not down."

"Yes, he's down, sir."

"But where can Mr. Chattaway be?" exclaimed Ford the clerk, who made one of the throng. "Do you know, Mogg Pennet?"

"He's where ill-luck have overtook him for his cruelty to us," answered Mogg Pennet, flinging her hair from her sorrowful face. "I telled him the ill he forced on others might happen come home to him—that he might soon be lying in his pain, for aught he knew. And he went right off to the ill then and there—and he's a-lying in it."

The sympathies of the hearers were certainly not given to Mr. Chattaway. He was no favourite with his poor dependents at Blackstone, any more than he was with his neighbours around the Hold. But the woman's words were strange, and they pressed for an explanation.

"He be lying under the wall o' the old ruin," was her reply. "I come upon him there, and I guess his brave horse had flung him. When I'd ha' lifted him, he cried out with pain—as my poor man was a-crying in the night with his back—and I saw him lay hisself down again after I'd left him. And Chattaway, he swore at me for my help—and you can go to him and be swored at too! Happen his leg be broke."

The minister turned away to seek Mr. Chattaway. Unless completely disabled, it was necessary that he should be at the scene; no one of any particular authority was there to give orders; and the inevitable confusion attendant on such a calamity was thereby much increased. Ford the clerk sped after Mr. Lloyd, and one or two stragglers followed him; but the rest were chained to the more exciting scene of the disaster.

Mr. Chattaway had raised himself when they reached him, and was holding on by the wall. He broke into a storm of explanation and grumbling, especially at Ford, and asked why he could not have found him out sooner. As if Ford could divine what had befallen him! Mr. Lloyd stooped and touched the ankle, which was a good deal swollen. It was sprained, Chattaway said; but he thought he could manage to get on his horse with their assistance. He abused the beggar unmercifully, and expressed his intention of calling a meeting of his brother-magistrates, that measures might be taken to rid the country of tramps and razor-grinders; and he finished up in the heat of argument by calling the accident which had befallen him a cursed misfortune.

"Hush!" quietly interrupted Mr. Lloyd. "I should call it a blessing."

Chattaway stared at him, and deemed that he was carrying religion rather too far. As he looked, it struck him that both

of his rescuers wore very sad countenances; Ford in particular was excessively crestfallen. A sarcastic smile crossed his face.

"A blessing! to have my ankle sprained, and to waste my morning in this fashion? Thank you, Mr. Lloyd! You gentlemen who have nothing better to do with your time than to preach it away may think little of such an interruption, but to men of business it is not agreeable. A blessing!"

"Yes, I believe it to have come to you as such—sent direct from God. Were you not going into the pit this morning?"

"Yes, I was," impatiently answered Mr. Chattaway. "I should be there now, but for this—blessing! I wish you would not——"

"Just so," interrupted Mr. Lloyd, calmly. "And this fall has no doubt saved your life. There has been an accident in the pit, and the poor fellows who went down a few hours ago full of health and life, are about to be carried up dead."

The words brought Mr. Chattaway to his senses. "An accident!" he repeated. "What accident?—of what nature?" he added, turning hastily to Ford.

"Fire-damp, I believe, sir."

"Who was down?" was the next eager question.

"The usual men, sir. And—and—Mr. Rupert Trevlyn."

Chattaway with some difficulty repressed a shout. Idea after idea crowded upon his brain, one chasing another. Foremost amongst them rose distinctly the one thought of the morning from which he had striven to escape and could not: "Nothing can bring me security save the death of Rupert." Had the thought, the half-encouraged wish, brought on its realization?

"Rupert Trevlyn down the shaft!" he repeated, the moisture breaking from every pore of his face. "I know he went down; I sent him; but—but—did he not come up again?"

"No," gloomily replied Ford, who really liked Rupert; "he is down now. There's no hope that he'll come up alive."

Whether in his consternation he did not feel the ailments of body, or that his ankle, from the rest it had had, was really less painful than at first, Mr. Chattaway contrived to get pretty comfortably to the scene of action. The crowd had increased; people were coming up from far and near. Medical men had arrived, ready to give their services in case any sufferers were brought up alive. One of them examined Mr. Chattaway's ankle, and bound it up; the hurt, he said, was only a temporary one.

He, the owner of that pit, sat down on the side of a hand-

barrow, for he could not stand, and issued his orders in a sharp, concise tone; and the bodies began to be brought to the surface. One of the first to appear was that of the unfortunate man, Bean, to whom he had sent the message by Rupert. Chattaway looked on, half dazed. Would Rupert's body be the next? He could not realize the fact that he, from whom he had dreaded he knew not what, should soon be laid at his feet, cold and lifeless. Was he glad or sorry? Did grief for Rupert predominate? That there should be some sort of grief for him who had grown up in his house was only natural, even from Chattaway. Or did the intense relief that the death must bring overpower any warmer feeling? Perhaps Mr. Chattaway could not yet tell.

They were being brought up pretty quickly now, and were laid on the ground beside him, to be recognized by the unhappy relatives. The men to whom Chattaway had spoken that morning were amongst them: he had ordered them down as he rode off, and one and all had obeyed the mandate. Did he regret their fate? Did he compassionate the weeping wives and children? In a degree, perhaps, yes; but not as most men would have done.

A tall form interposed between him and the mouth of the pit—that of Mogg Pennet. She had been watching for a body which had not yet been brought up. Suddenly she turned to Mr. Chattaway.

"You have killed him, master; you have made my children orphans. But for your coming on in your hardness to drive him out when he warn't fit to go, we should ha' had somebody still to work for us. Happen you may have heered of a curse? I'd like to give ye one now."

"Somebody take this woman away," cried Mr. Chattaway. "She'll be better at home."

"Ay, take her away," retorted Mogg; "don't let her plaints be heered, lest folk might say they be just. Send her home to her fatherless children, and send her dead man after her to lie among 'em till he's buried. Happen, when you come to your death, Mr. Chattaway, you'll have us all afore your mind, to comfort you!"

She stopped. Another ill-fated man was being drawn up, and she turned to wait for it, her hands clenched, her face white and haggard in its intensity. The burden came, and was laid near the rest; but it was not the one for which she was waiting. Another woman darted forward; *she* knew it too well;

and she clasped her hands round it, and sobbed in agony. Mogg Pennet turned resolutely to the mouth of the pit again, watching still.

"Be they all dead? How many was down?"

The voice came from behind Mogg Pennet, and she screamed and started round. There stood her husband. How had he escaped from the pit?

"I haven't been a-nigh it," he answered. "I couldn't get down to the pit, try as I would, without a rest, and I halted at Green's. Who's dead among 'em, and who's alive?"

"God be thanked!" exclaimed Mogg Pennet, with a sob.

All Mr. Chattaway's faculties were strained on the mouth of that yawning pit, and what it might yield up. As body after body was brought to the surface—seven of them were up now—he cast his anxious looks upon it, expecting to recognize the fair face, the silken hair of Rupert Trevlyn. Expecting and yet dreading—don't think him worse than he was; with the frightened, half-shrinking dread ordinarily experienced by women, or by men of nervous and timid temperament. So utterly did this suspense absorb him as to make him almost oblivious to the painful features of the scene, the wails of woe, the bursts of lamentation.

Happening for a minute to turn his eyes from the pit, he saw in the distance a pony-carriage approaching, which looked uncommonly like that of Miss Diana Trevlyn. Instinct told him that the two figures seated in it were his wife and Miss Diana, although as yet he could not see whether they were women or men. It was slowly winding down a distant hill, and would have to ascend another and come over the flat stretch of country ere it could reach them. He beckoned his clerk Ford to him in a sort of terror.

"Run, Ford! Make all speed. I think I see Miss Trevlyn's pony-carriage yonder with the ladies in it. Don't let them approach. Tell them to turn aside, to the office, and I'll come to them. Anywhere; anywhere but here."

Ford ran with all his might. He met the carriage just at the top of the nearest hill, and unceremoniously laid his hand upon the pony, giving Mr. Chattaway's message as well as his breathless state would allow—begging that they would turn aside and not approach the pit.

It was evident that they were strangers as yet to the news, but the crowd and excitement round the pit had been causing them apprehension and a foreshadowing of the truth. Miss

Diana, paying, as it appeared, little heed to the message, extended her whip in the direction of the scene.

"I see what it is, Ford. Don't beat about the bush. How many were down the shaft?"

"A great many, ma'am," was Ford's reply. "The pit was in full work to-day."

"Was it fire-damp?"

"I believe so."

"Mr. Chattaway's safe, you say? He was not down? I suppose he was not likely to be down?"

"No," answered Ford. But the thought of Mr. Chattaway's accident from another source, which he did not know whether to disclose or not, and the consciousness of a worse calamity, caused him to speak hesitatingly. Miss Diana was quick of apprehension, and it awoke it.

"Was any one down the shaft besides the men? Was—where's Rupert Trevlyn?"

Ford looked as if he dared not answer.

Mrs. Chattaway caught the alarm. She half rose in the low carriage, and stretched out her hands in a pleading attitude; as though Ford held the issues of life and death.

"Oh, speak, speak! He was not down the shaft! Surely Rupert was not down the shaft!"

"He had gone down but a short time before," said the young man in a whisper—for where was the use of denying the fact, now that they had guessed it? "We shall all mourn him, ma'am. I had almost as soon it had been me."

"Gone down the shaft but a short time before!" mechanically repeated Miss Diana in her horror. But she was interrupted by a cry from Ford. Mrs. Chattaway had fallen back on her seat in a fainting-fit.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SHOCK FOR MR. CHATTAWAY.

THE brightness of the day was turning to gloom, as if the heavens sympathized with the melancholy scene upon earth. Quietly pushing his way through the confusion, the moans and lamentations, the dense mass of human beings surrounding the mouth of the pit, was a tall individual whose acquaintance you

have made before. It was Mr. Daw with his red umbrella: the latter an unvarying appendage, whether the sun was shining or the clouds dropped rain. He went straight up to certain pale faces lying there in a row, and glanced at them one by one.

"They are saying that Rupert Trevlyn is amongst the sufferers," he observed to those nearest to him.

"So he is, master."

"I do not see him here."

"No; he ain't up yet."

"Is there no hope that he may be brought to the surface alive?"

They shook their heads. "Not now. He have been down too long. There's not a chance for him."

Something like emotion passed over Mr. Daw's features.

"How came *he* to be down the pit?" he asked. "Was it his business to go down?"

"Not in ord'nary. No: 'tworn't once in six months as there was aught to take him there."

"Then what took him there to-day?" was Mr. Daw's next question.

"The master sent him," replied the man, pointing towards Mr. Chattaway.

Apparently Mr. Daw had not observed Mr. Chattaway before, and he turned and walked towards him. Vexation at the loss of Rupert—it may be surely called vexation rather than grief, since he had not known Rupert sufficiently long to *love* him—a loss so sudden and terrible, was rendering Mr. Daw unjust. Chattaway's worst enemy could not fairly blame that gentleman with reference to the fate of Rupert: but Mr. Daw was in a hasty mood.

"Is it true that you sent Rupert Trevlyn down the shaft only a few minutes before this calamity occurred?"

The address and the speaker equally took Mr. Chattaway by surprise. His attention was riveted on something then being raised from the shaft, and he had not noticed the stranger. Hastily turning his head, he saw, first the conspicuous red umbrella, next its obnoxious and dangerous owner.

Ah, but no longer dangerous now. That terrible fear was over for ever. With the first glimpse, Mr. Chattaway's face had turned to a white heat, from the force of habit; but the next moment's reflection reassured him, and he retained his equanimity.

"What did you say, sir?"

"Was there no one else, Mr. Chattaway, to serve your turn, but you must send down your wronged and unhappy nephew?" reiterated Mr. Daw, in a tone that penetrated to every ear. "I have heard it said, since I came into this neighbourhood, that Mr. Chattaway would be glad, if by some lucky chance Squire Trevlyn's grandson and legal heir could be put out of his path. It seems he has succeeded in accomplishing it."

Mr. Chattaway's face grew dark and frowning. "Take care what you say, sir, or you shall answer for your words. I ask you what you mean."

"And I ask you—Was there no one you could despatch this morning into that dangerous mine, then on the very eve of exploding, but that helpless boy Rupert, who might not resist your authority, and so went to his death? Was there no one, I ask?"

Mr. Daw's zeal was decidedly outrunning his discretion. It is the province of exaggeration to destroy its cause, and the unfounded charge—which, temperately put, might have inflicted its sting—fell comparatively harmless on the ear of Mr. Chattaway. He could only stare and wonder—as if a proposition had been put to him in some foreign language.

"Why—bless my heart!—are you mad?" he presently exclaimed. His tone was sufficiently equable. "Could *I* tell the mine was going to explode? Had but the faintest warning of such a catastrophe reached me, do you suppose I should not have taken measures to empty the pit of all human souls?—ay, though it had been necessary to go down myself and face the danger. I am as sorry for Rupert's fate as you can be: but the blame is not mine. It is not any one's—unless it be his own. There was plenty of time—time and again—for him to leave the pit after he had delivered the message I sent him down with, had he chosen to do so. But I suppose he stopped gossiping with the men. This land belongs to me, sir. Unless you have any business here, I must request you to leave it."

There was so much truth in what Mr. Chattaway urged that the stranger began to be a little ashamed of his heat. "Nevertheless, it is a thorn removed from your path," he cried aloud. "And you would have removed him from it yourself long ago, could you have done it without sin."

A half murmur of assent arose from the crowd. The stranger had hit the exact facts. Could the master of Trevlyn Hold have removed Rupert Trevlyn from his path without "sin,"

without danger or trouble, it had long ago been done. In short, were it as easy to put some obnoxious individual out of life, as it is to stow away an offending piece of furniture, Mr. Chattaway had most assuredly not waited until now to rid himself of Rupert: and those listeners knew it.

Mr. Chattaway turned his frowning face on the incautious murmurers; but before more could be said by any one, the circle was penetrated by some new-comers, one of them in distress of mind that could not be hidden or controlled. Mrs. Chattaway having recovered from her apparent fainting-fit—though in reality she had not lost consciousness, and her closed eyes and intense paleness had led to the mistake—the pony-carriage had been urged with all speed to the scene of action. In vain the clerk Ford reiterated Mr. Chattaway's protest against their approaching it. Miss Diana Trevlyn was not one to attend against her will to the protests of Mr. Chattaway.

"I would have saved his life with my own; I would have gone down the shaft in his place had it been possible," wailed poor Mrs. Chattaway, wringing her hands, and wholly forgetting all the reticence usually imparted by the presence of her husband.

Her grief was genuine; and the throng sympathized with her almost as it did with those despairing women, weeping in their new widowhood. But the neighbours had not to learn now that Madam Chattaway loved her dead brother's children, if her husband did not.

"For Heaven's sake don't take on so here!" growled Mr. Chattaway, in impotent anger. "Have you *no* sense of the fitness of things?"

But his wife, however meekly subservient at other times, was not in a state for subservience then. She could not define the sensations that oppressed her; she only felt that all was over; the unhappy boy had gone from them for ever; that the cruel wrongs inflicted on him throughout life were now irreparable.

"He has gone with all our unkindness on his head," she wailed, partially unconscious, no doubt, of what she said; "gone to meet his father, my poor lost brother, bearing to him the tale of his wrongs! Oh, if——"

"Be silent, will you?" shrieked Chattaway. "Are you going mad, Edith?"

Mrs. Chattaway covered her face with her hands, and leaned against the barrow on which her husband was sitting. Miss Diana Trevlyn, who had been gathering various particulars

from the crowd, who had said a word of comfort (though it was little comfort they could listen to yet) to the miserable women, came up at this moment to Chattaway.

"It was a very unhappy thing that you should have sent Rupert into the pit this morning," she said, her face wearing its most haughty severity.

"Yes," he answered. "But I could not foresee what was about to happen. It—it might have been Cris. Had Cris been in the way at the time, and not Rupert, I should have despatched him."

"Chattaway, I would give all my fortune to have him back again. I——"

A strange noise and shouting on the outskirts of the crowd attracted their attention, and Miss Diana brought her sentence to an abrupt conclusion, and turned sharply towards it, for the shouts bore the sound of congratulation and triumph; and a few voices were half breaking into hurrahs. Strange sounds, in that awful death-scene!

Who was this advancing towards them? The crowd had parted to give him place, and he came leaping to the centre, all haste and excitement—a fair, gentlemanly young man, with his silken curls uncovered, and his cheeks hectic with excitement. Mrs. Chattaway cried aloud with a joyful cry, and her husband's eyes and mouth slowly opened as though he saw a spectre.

It was Rupert Trevlyn. Rupert, it appeared, had not been down the pit at all. Sufficiently obedient to Mr. Chattaway, but not implicitly obedient to the letter, Rupert, when he reached the pit's mouth, had seen the last of those men descending whom Chattaway had imperiously ordered down, and he sent the message to Bean by him. His chief inducement was that he had just met a gentleman of his acquaintance who had come to tell him of a pony for sale—for Rupert had been making inquiries for one, having been commissioned to do so by Miss Trevlyn. It required little pressing to induce Rupert to abandon the office and Blackstone for some hours, and start off to see this pony. And that was where he had been. Mrs. Chattaway clasped her hands round his neck, in utter defiance of her husband's prejudices, unremembered then, and sobbed forth her emotion.

"Why, Aunt Edith, you never thought I was one of them, did you? Bless you! I am never down the pit. I should not be likely to fall into such a calamity as that. Poor fellows! I must go and ascertain who was there."

The crowd, finding Rupert safe, broke into a cheer, and a voice shouted—could it have been Mr. Daw's?—"Long live the heir! long live young Squire Trevlyn!" and the words were taken up and echoed in the air.

And Mr. Chattaway? If you want me to describe his emotions to you, I cannot do it. They were of a mixed nature. We must not go so far as to say that he *regretted* to see Rupert back in life; that he did not feel any satisfaction at his having escaped the dreadful fate; but with his reappearance all the old fears returned. They returned tenfold from the very fact of his short immunity from them, and the audacious words of the crowd turned his face green. In conjunction with the more audacious words previously spoken by the stranger and the very demonstrative behaviour of his wife, they were as a sudden blow to Mr. Chattaway.

Those shouters saw his falling countenance, his changed look, and drew their own conclusions. "Ah! he'd put away the young heir if he could," they whispered to one another. "But he haven't got shut of him this time."

No; Mr. Chattaway certainly had not.

"God has been merciful to your nephew," interposed the peaceful voice of Mr. Lloyd, drawing near. "He has been pleased to save him, though He has seen fit to take others. We know not why it should be—that some should be struck down, and others spared. His ways are not as our ways."

They lay there, a long line of them, and the minister pointed with his finger as he spoke. Most of the faces looked calm and peaceful. Oh! were they ready? Had they lived to make God their friend? Had they lived trusting in Christ their Saviour? My friends, this sudden call comes to others as well as to miners: it behoves us all to be ready for it.

As the day drew on, the excitement did not lessen; and Mr. Chattaway almost forgot the hurt, which he would have made a great deal of at another time. But the ankle was considerably swollen and inflamed, giving him pain still, and it caused him to quit the scene for home earlier than he might otherwise have done.

He left Cris in his place to superintend, to direct, to be the controlling head and hand. Cris was not incompetent for the task; but he might have displayed a little more sympathy with the sufferers without compromising his dignity. Cris had arrived in much bustle and excitement at the scene of action, putting eager questions about Rupert, as to how he came to

be down the shaft, and whether he was really dead. The report that he was dead had reached Cris Chattaway's ears at some miles' distance, as it had reached those of many others.

It reached Maude Trevlyn's. The servants at Trevlyn Hold heard it, and they foolishly went to Maude. "There had been an explosion in the pit, and Master Rupert was amongst the killed." Maude was as one stricken with horror. She did not faint, did not cry; she put on a shawl and bonnet mechanically, as she would for any ordinary walk, and went out of the house on her way to Blackstone. "Don't go, Maude; it will only be more painful to you," Octave had said in a kindly tone, as she saw her about to depart; but Maude went on as though she heard not. She turned towards the fields, and bore swiftly on with a dry eye and burning brow. As she was turning from the fields into the road, she met George Ryle.

"Where are you going, Maude?"

"Oh, George, don't stop me! I had no one but him."

But George did stop her. He saw her countenance of despair, and suspected what was wrong. Putting his arm gently round her, he held her so that she should not go on. Maude supposed he had heard the tidings, and was unwilling that she should approach the terrible scene.

"Maude, my darling, be comforted. You have been hearing the report that Rupert was a sharer in the calamity, as I heard it; but the report was a false one. Rupert is alive and well. I am telling you the happy truth, Maude."

Overcome by emotion, Maude leaned upon him and sobbed out her tears; tears more blissful than she had perhaps ever shed. Mr. George would have had no objection to apply himself to the task of soothing her until the shades of night should fall; but scarcely a minute had they so stood when an interruption, in the shape of some advancing vehicle, was heard. These envious interruptions will occur at the most unwelcome moments, as perhaps your own experience may enable you to bear witness to.

It proved to be the pony-carriage of Miss Diana Trevlyn. Mr. Chattaway with his lame foot sat beside her, and Mrs. Chattaway occupied the groom's place behind. Miss Diana, who chose to drive her own pony, although she had a gentleman at hand, pulled up in surprise at the sight of Maude.

"I had heard that Rupert was killed," she explained, advancing to the carriage, her face still wet with tears. "But George Ryle, whom I have just met, has told me the truth."

"And so you were starting for Blackstone!" returned Miss Diana. "Would it have done any good, child? But that is just like you, Maude. You will act upon impulse to the end of life."

Mrs. Chattaway bent forward with her sweetest smile. "He is not injured, Maude; he is on his way home, alive and well. I am sorry that you should have heard what you did."

"It seems to me that the whole parish has heard it," ejaculated Mr. Chattaway.

Room was made for Maude beside Mrs. Chattaway, and the pony-carriage went on. It had gone only a few paces when the Reverend Mr. Daw came in sight. Was the man gifted with ubiquity! But an hour or two, as it seemed, and he had been bearding Mr. Chattaway at the mine. He lifted his hat as he passed, and Miss Diana and Maude bowed in return. He did not approach the carriage, or attempt to stop it; but went on with long strides, as does one in a hurry.

Mr. Chattaway, who had never looked towards the man, never moved a muscle of his face, turned his head to steal a glance at him when he deemed he was at a safe distance. There stood Mr. Daw, talking to George Ryle, one hand stretched out in the heat of argument, the other grasping the red umbrella, which was turned over his shoulder.

"Treason, treason!" mentally ejaculated the master of Trevlyn Hold, and he raised his handkerchief to wipe the moisture that was gathering on his face. "How I might have laughed at them now, if—if—if that had turned out to be true about Rupert!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OLD TROUBLE AGAIN.

From ten days to a fortnight went by, and affairs were resuming their ordinary routine. All outward indications of the accident at the pit were gone; the bodies of the poor sufferers were buried; the widows, mothers, orphans, had begun to realize their destitution. It was not all quite done with, however. The inquest, adjourned from time to time, was not yet concluded; and popular feeling ran high against Mr. Chattaway. Certain precautions, having reference to the miners' safety,

which ought to have been observed in the pit, had not been observed; and hence the calamity had arisen. Other owners of mines in the vicinity had caused these precautions to be put in use long ago; but Mr. Chattaway, whether from inertness, or regard to expense, had not done so. People spoke out freely now, not only in asserting that these means of safeguard must no longer be delayed—and of that Mr. Chattaway was himself sensible, in a disbelieving, sullen sort of way—but also that it was incumbent on him to do something for the widows and orphans. A most distasteful hint to a man of so near a disposition as Mr. Chattaway. Miss Diana Trevlyn had gone down to the desolate homes and rendered them glad with her bounty; but to make anything like a permanent provision for them was Mr. Chattaway's business, and not hers. The sufferers believed that Mr. Chattaway was not likely to make even the smallest for them; and they were not far wrong. His own hurt, the sprained ankle, had speedily recovered, and was now well again.

And the officious stranger, and his interference for the welfare of Rupert? That also was falling to the ground, and he, Mr. Daw, was now on the eve of departure. However well meant these efforts of his had been, they could only be impotent in the face of Squire Trevlyn's will. Mr. Daw himself was at length convinced of the fact, and he began to doubt whether his zeal had not outrun his discretion. Messrs. Peterby and Jones angrily told him that it had, when he acknowledged, in answer to their imperative question, that he had had no grounds whatever to go upon, save goodwill to Rupert. Somewhat of this changed feeling may have prompted him to call at Trevlyn Hold to pay a farewell visit of civility; which he did do, and got into hot water.

He asked for Miss Diana Trevlyn. But Miss Diana happened to be out, and Octave, who was seated at the piano when he was shown in, whirled round upon the stool in anger. She had taken the most intense dislike to this officious man: possibly a shade of the same dread which filled her father's heart had penetrated hers.

"Miss Trevlyn! If Miss Trevlyn were at home, she would not receive you," was her haughty salutation, as she rose from her stool. "It is impossible that you can be received at the Hold. Unless I am mistaken, sir, you had an intimation of this from Squire Chattaway."

"My visit, young lady, was not to Mr. Chattaway, but to

Miss Trevlyn. So long as the Hold is Miss Trevlyn's residence, her friends must call at it—although it may happen to be also that of Mr. Chattaway. I am sorry she is out: I wish to say a word to her before my departure. I leave to-night for good."

"And a good thing too," said angry Octave, forgetting her manners. But this answer had not conciliated her, especially the very pointed tone with which he had called her father *Mr.* Chattaway.

She rang the bell loudly to recall the servant. She did not ask him to sit, but stood with her finger pointed to the door; and Mr. Daw had no resource but to obey the movement and go out—somewhat, it must be confessed, ignominiously.

In the avenue he met Miss Trevlyn, and she was more civil to him than Octave had been. "I leave to-night," he said to her. "I go back to my residence abroad, never in all probability again to quit it. I should have been glad to serve poor Rupert by helping him to his rights—Miss Trevlyn, I cannot avoid calling them so—but I find the law and Mr. Chattaway are stronger than my wishes. It was, perhaps, foolish of me ever to take up the notion, and I feel half inclined to apologize to Mr. Chattaway."

"Of all visionary notions, that was about the wildest I ever heard of," said Miss Diana.

"Yes; one utterly vain and useless. I see it now. I do not the less feel Rupert Trevlyn's position, you must understand; the injustice dealt out to him lies with as keen a sense on my mind as it ever did: but I do see how hopeless, and on my part how foolish, was any attempt at remedy. I should be willing to say this to Mr. Chattaway if I saw him, and to tell him I had done with it for ever. Mr. Freeman hints to me that I was not justified in thus attempting to disturb the peace of a family, and he may be right. But, Miss Trevlyn, may I ask you to be kind to Rupert?"

Miss Trevlyn threw back her head. "I have yet to learn that I am not kind to him, sir."

"I mean with a tender kindness. I fancy I see in him indications of the same disease that was so fatal to his father. It has been on my mind to invite him to go back home with me, and try what the warmer climate may do for him; but the feeling (amounting almost to a prevision) that the result in his case would be the same as it was in his father's, withholds me. I should not like to take him out to die: neither would

I charge myself with the task of nursing one in a fatal malady."

"You are very good," said Miss Diana, somewhat stiffly. "Rupert will do well where he is, I have no doubt: and for myself, I do not anticipate any such illness for him. I wish you a pleasant journey, Mr. Daw."

"Thank you, madam. I leave him to your kindness. It seems to me only a duty I owe to his dead father to mention to you that he *may* need extra care and kindness; and there's none so fitting to bestow it upon him as you—the guardian appointed by his mother."

"By the way, I cannot learn anything about that document," resumed Miss Diana. "Mr. Chattaway says that it never came to hand."

"Madam, it must have come to hand. If the letter in which it was enclosed reached Trevlyn Hold, it is a pretty good proof that the document also reached it. Mr. Chattaway must be mistaken."

Miss Diana did not see how, unless he was wilfully mistaken—was falsely denying the fact. "A thought struck me the other day, which I wish to mention to you," she said aloud, quitting the subject for a different one. "The graves of my brother and his wife—are they kept properly in order?"

"Quite so," he answered. "I see to that."

"Then you must allow me to repay to you any expense you may have been put to. I——"

"Not so," he interrupted. "There is no expense—or none to speak of. The ground was purchased for ever, *à perpétuité*, as we call it over there, and the shrubs planted on the site require little or no care to keep them in order. Now and then I do a half-day's work there myself, for the love of my lost friends. Should you ever travel so far—and I should be happy to welcome you—you will find their last resting-place well attended to, Miss Trevlyn."

"I thank you much," she said in heartier tones, as she held out her hand. "And I regret now that circumstances have prevented my extending hospitality to you."

And so they parted amicably. And the great ogre which Mr. Chattaway had feared would eat him up, had subsided into a very harmless man indeed. Miss Diana stepped on to the Hold, deciding that her respected brother-in-law *was* a booby for having been so easily frightened into terror.

As Mr. Daw passed the lodge, old Canham was airing him-

self at the door, Ann being out at work. The gentleman stopped.

"You were not here when I passed just now," he said. "I looked in at the window, and opened the door, but could see no one."

"I was in the back place, maybe, sir. When Ann's absent, I has to get my own meals, and wash up my cups and things."

"I must say farewell to you. I leave to-night."

"Leave the place! What, for good, sir?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Daw. "In a week's time from this, I hope to be comfortably settled in my own home, some hundreds of miles away."

"And Master Rupert? and the Hold?" returned old Canham, the corners of his mouth considerably drawn down. "Is he to be rei'stated in it?"

Mr. Daw shook his head. "I did all I could, and it did not succeed: I can do no more. My will is good enough—as I think I have proved; but I have no power."

"Then it's all over again, sir—dropped through, as may be said?"

"It has."

Old Canham leaned heavily on his crutch, lost in thought. "It won't drop for ever, sir," he presently raised his head to say. "There have been something within me a long, long while, a whispering that Master Rupert's as safe to come to his own afore he dies, as that I be to go into my grave. When this stir took place, following on your arrival here, I thought the time had come then. It seems it hadn't; but come it *will*, as sure as that I be saying it—as sure as that he's the true heir of Squire Trevlyn."

"I hope it will," was the warm answer. "You will none of you rejoice in it more truly than I. My friend Freeman has promised to write occasionally to me, and——"

Mr. Daw was interrupted. Riding his shaggy pony in at the lodge gate—a strong, brisk little Welsh animal bought a week ago for him by Miss Diana, was Rupert himself. Upon how slender a thread do the great events of life turn! The reflection is so trite that it seems the most unnecessary reiteration to repeat it! but there are times when it is brought to the mind with an intensity that is positively startling.

Mr. Chattaway, by the merest accident—as it appeared to him—had forgotten a letter that morning when he went to Blackstone. He had written it before leaving home, intending

to post it on his road, but left it on his desk. It was drawing towards the close of the afternoon before he remembered it. He then ordered Rupert to ride home as fast as possible and post it, so that it might be in time for the evening mail. And this Rupert had now come to do. All very simple, you will say: but I can tell you that but for the return of Rupert Trevlyn at that hour, the most tragical part of this history would in all probability never have taken place, and you must have gone without the cream of the story.

"The very man I was wishing to see!" exclaimed Mr. Daw, arresting Rupert and his pony in their career. "I feared I should have to leave without wishing you good-bye."

"Are you going to-day?" asked Rupert.

"To-night. You seem in a hurry."

"I am in a hurry," replied Rupert, as he explained about the letter. "If I don't make haste, I shall lose the post."

"But I want to talk to you a bit. Do you go back to Blackstone?"

"Oh no; not to-day."

"Suppose you come in to the parsonage for an hour or two this evening?" suggested Mr. Daw. "Come to tea. I am sure they'll be glad to see you."

"All right; I'll come," cried Rupert, cantering off.

But a few minutes, and he cantered down again, the letter in his hand. Old Canham was alone then. Rupert looked towards him, and nodded as he went past. There was a receiving-house for letters at a solitary general shop, not far beyond Trevlyn Farm, and to this Rupert went, posted the letter, and returned to Trevlyn Hold. Sending his pony to the stable, he began to put himself to rights for his visit to Mr. Freeman's—a most ill-fated visit, as it was to turn out.

They took tea at the parsonage at six, as he knew, and he had to hasten to be in time. He had made his scanty dinner, as usual, at Blackstone. In descending the stairs from his room, he encountered Mrs. Chattaway in the lower corridor.

"Are you going out, Rupert?"

"I am going to the parsonage, Aunt Edith. Mr. Daw leaves this evening, and he asked me to go in for an hour or two."

"Very well. Remember me kindly to Mrs. Freeman. And, Rupert—my dear——"

"What?" he asked, arresting his hasty footsteps and turning to speak.

"You will not be late?"

"No, no," he answered, his careless tone a contrast to her almost solemn one. "It's all right, Aunt Edith."

But for that encounter with Mrs. Chattaway, the Hold would have been in ignorance of Rupert's movements that evening. He spent a very pleasant one. It happened that George Ryle called in also at the parsonage on Mr. Freeman, and was induced to remain. Mrs. Freeman was hospitable, and put before them a good supper, to which Rupert at least did justice.

The up-train was due at Barbrook station at ten o'clock, and George Ryle and Rupert accompanied Mr. Daw to it. The parson did not: he did not care to go out at night, unless called forth by duty. They reached the station five minutes before the hour, and Mr. Daw took his ticket and waited for the train.

Waited a long time. Ten o'clock struck, and the minutes went on and on. George, who was pacing the narrow platform with him, drew Rupert aside and spoke.

"Should you not get back to the Hold? Chattaway may lock you out again."

"Let him," carelessly answered Rupert. "I shall get in somehow, I dare say."

It was not George's place to control Rupert Trevlyn, and they paced the platform as before, talking with Mr. Daw. Half-past ten, and no train! The porters stood about, looking and wondering; the station-master was fidgety: he wanted to get home to bed."

"Will it come at all?" asked Mr. Daw, whose patience appeared exemplary.

"Oh, it 'll come, safe enough," was the reply of one of the two porters. "It never keeps its time, this train don't: but it's not often as late as this."

"Why does it not keep its time?"

"'Cause it have got to wait at Layton's Heath for a cross-train; and if that don't keep its time—and it never do—this un can't."

With which satisfactory explanation, the porter made a dash into a shed, and appeared to be busy with what looked like a collection of dark lanthorns.

"I shall begin to wish I had taken my departure this afternoon, as I intended, if this delay is to be much prolonged," remarked Mr. Daw.

Even as he spoke, there were indications of the arrival of the

train. At twenty minutes to eleven it came up, and the station-master gave some sharp words to the guard. The guard returned them in kind; its want of punctuality was not his fault. Mr. Daw took his seat, and George and Rupert hastened away to their respective homes. But it was nearly eleven o'clock, and Rupert, in spite of his boasted bravery, did fear the wrath of Mr. Chattaway.

The household had retired to their rooms, but that gentleman was sitting up, looking over some accounts. The fact of Rupert's absence was known to him, and he experienced a grim satisfaction in reflecting that the keys were turned upon him—that he was locked out for the night. It is impossible for me to explain to you why this should have imparted satisfaction to the mind of Mr. Chattaway; there are things in this world not easily explained, and you must be contented with the simple fact that it was so.

But Mrs. Chattaway? She had gone to her chamber sick and trembling, feeling that the old trouble was about to be renewed this night. If the lad was not allowed to come in, where could he go? where find a shelter? Could *she* let him in, was the thought that hovered in her mind. She would, if she could accomplish it without the knowledge of her husband. And that might be practicable to-night, for he was shut up and absorbed by those accounts of his.

Gently opening her dressing-room window, she watched for Rupert: watched until her heart failed her. You know how long the time seems in this sort of waiting. It appeared to her that he was never coming—as it had recently appeared to Mr. Daw, with regard to the train. The distant clocks were beginning to chime eleven when he arrived. He saw his aunt; saw the signs that she made to him, and contrived to hear and understand her whispered words.

"Creep round to the back-door, and I will let you in."

So Rupert crept softly round; walking on the grass: and Mrs. Chattaway crept softly down the stairs without a light, undid the bolt of the door silently, and admitted Rupert.

"Thank you, dear Aunt Edith. I could not well help being late. The train——"

"Not a word, not a breath!" she interrupted, in a terrified whisper. "Take off your boots, and go up to bed without noise."

Rupert obeyed her in silence. They stole upstairs, the one after the other. Mrs. Chattaway turned into her room, and Rupert went on and gained his.

And the master of Trevlyn Hold, bending over his account-books, knew nothing of the disobedience that had been enacted towards him, but sat there expecting and expecting to hear Rupert's ring echoing through the house. Better, far better that he had heard it!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NEXT MORNING.

THE full light of day had not come, and the autumn night's gentle frost lingered yet upon the grass, when the master of Trevlyn Hold rose from his uneasy couch. Things were troubling him; and when the mind is not easy, the night's rest is apt to be disturbed.

That business of the mine explosion was not over, neither were its consequences to the pocket of Mr. Chattaway. The old fear in regard to the succession, which for some days had been comparatively buried, had broken out again in his mind, he could not tell why or wherefore; and the defiant disobedience of Rupert, not only in stopping out too late the previous night, but in not coming in at all, angered him beyond everything. Altogether, his bed had not been an easy one, and he arose with the dawn unrefreshed.

It was not the fact of having slept little which got him up at that unusually early hour; that would rather have caused him to lie the longer; but necessity has no law, and he was obliged to rise. A famous autumn fair, held at some fifteen miles' distance, and which he never failed to attend, was the moving power. His horse was to be ready for him, and he would ride there to breakfast; according to his annual custom. Down he went; sleepy, cross, gaping; and the first thing he did was to stumble over a pair of boots at the back-door.

The slightest thing would put Mr. Chattaway out when in his present temper. For the matter of that, a slight thing would put him out at any time. What business had the servants to leave boots about in *his* way? They knew he would be going out at that back-door the first thing in the morning, on his way to the stables. Mr. Chattaway gave the things a kick, unbolted the door, and drew it open. Whose were they?

Now that the light was admitted, he saw at a glance that they

were a gentleman's boots, not a servant's. Had Cris stolen in by the back-door last night and left his boots there? No; Cris came in openly at the front, came in early, before Mr. Chattaway went to bed. And—now that he looked more closely—those boots were too small for Cris.

They were Rupert's! Yes, undoubtedly they were Rupert's boots. What brought *them* there? Rupert could not have entered to leave them: he could not pass through thick walls and barred-up doors. Mr. Chattaway, completely taken back, stooped and stared at the boots as if they had been two curious animals.

A faint noise interrupted him. It was the approach of the first servant coming down to her day's work; a brisk young girl called Bridget, who acted as kitchenmaid.

"What brings these boots here?" demanded Mr. Chattaway, in the repelling tone he generally used to his servants.

Bridget advanced and looked at them. "They are Mr. Rupert's, sir," answered she.

"I did not ask you whose they were: I can see that for myself. I asked what brought them here. These boots are dirty; they must have been worn yesterday."

"I suppose he must have left them here last night; perhaps he came in at this door," returned the girl, wondering what business of her master's the boots could be.

"Perhaps he did not," retorted Mr. Chattaway. "He did not come in at all last night."

"Oh yes, he did, sir. He's upstairs in bed now."

"Who's upstairs in bed?" rejoined Mr. Chattaway, believing the girl was either mistaken or telling him a wilful untruth.

"Mr. Rupert, sir. Wasn't it him you were asking about?"

"Mr. Rupert is not upstairs in bed. How dare you say so to my face?"

"But he is," said the girl. "Leastways, unless he has gone out of it this morning."

"Have you been into his room to see?" demanded Mr. Chattaway, in his ill-humour.

"No, sir, I have not; it's not likely I should presume to do such a thing. But I saw Mr. Rupert go into his room last night; so it's only natural to suppose he is there this morning."

The words confounded Mr. Chattaway. "You say you saw Mr. Rupert go into his room last night? You must have been dreaming, girl."

"No, sir, I wasn't; I'm sure I saw him. I stepped on my

gown and tore it as I was going up to bed last night, and I went to the housemaid's room to borrow a needle and cotton to mend it. I was going back across the passage with my candle in my hand, when I saw Mr. Rupert at the end of the corridor turning into his chamber." So far, true. But Bridget did not think it necessary to add that she had remained a good half-hour gossiping with the housemaid, before going back with the needle and cotton. Mr. Chattaway, however, might have guessed that, for he demanded to know the time, and Bridget confessed that it had gone eleven.

Gone eleven! The whole house, himself excepted, had gone upstairs at half-past ten, and Rupert was then not in. How had he got in? Who had admitted him?

"Which of you servants opened the door to him?" thundered Mr. Chattaway.

"I shouldn't think any of us did, sir. I can answer for me and cook and Mary. We never heard Mr. Rupert ring at all last night: and if we had heard him, we shouldn't have went down to let him in after your forbidding it. I said to cook when I got back to our room that Mr. Rupert had come in, and she said she supposed master had opened the door to him."

The girl was evidently speaking truth, and Mr. Chattaway was thrown into perplexity. He believed as she did—that not a servant would dare to go down and admit Rupert in the face of his command to the contrary. Who *had* admitted him? Could it have been Miss Diana Trevlyn? Scarcely. Miss Diana, had she so taken it in her head, would have admitted him without the least reference to the feelings of Mr. Chattaway; but then she would not have done it in secret. Had it pleased Miss Diana to come down and admit Rupert, she would have done it openly; and what puzzled Mr. Chattaway more than anything, was the silence with which the admission had been accomplished. He had sat with his ears open, and not the faintest sound had reached them. Was it Maude? No: he felt sure that Maude would be even more chary than the servants of disobeying him. Then who was it? A half-suspicion of his wife suggested itself to him, only to be flung away the next moment. His submissive, timorous wife! She would be the last, he thought, to array herself against him.

But the minutes were getting on, and Mr. Chattaway had no time to waste. The fair commenced early, its business being generally over before mid-day. He went round to the stables,

found his horse ready for him, and rode away, the disobedience he had just discovered filling his mind to the exclusion of every other annoyance.

He soon came up with company. Riding out of the fold-yard of Trevlyn Farm as he passed it, came George Ryle and his brother Treve. They were bound for the same place as Mr. Chattaway, and the three horses fell in abreast.

"Are you going?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway to Trevlyn, some surprise in his tone.

"Of course I am," answered Treve. "There's always some fun at Whitterbey fair. George is going to initiate me to-day into the mysteries of buying and selling cattle."

"Against you set up for yourself?" remarked Mr. Chattaway, some cynicism in his tone.

"Just so," said Treve, who detected it. "I hope you'll find me as good a tenant as you have found George."

George was smiling. "He is about to settle down into a steady-going farmer, Mr. Chattaway."

"When?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

George opened his mouth to speak, but appeared to hesitate. He glanced at Trevlyn, as if waiting for the answer to come from him.

"At once," said Treve, readily. "There's no reason why it should not be told. I am home for good, Mr. Chattaway: I don't intend to leave it again."

"And Oxford?" returned Mr. Chattaway, surprised at the news. "You had another term to keep."

"Ay, but I shall not keep it. I have had enough of Oxford. One can't keep straight there, you know: there's no end of expense to be gone into; and my mother is tired of it."

"Tired of the bills," said Mr. Chattaway.

"Yes. Not but that the paying them has been George's concern, more than hers. No one can deny that it has been; but George is a good fellow, and *he* has not complained."

"Are there to be two masters on Trevlyn Farm?" questioned Mr. Chattaway.

"No," cried Treve, before George could speak. "I know my place better, I hope, than to put my incompetent self above George—whatever my mother may wish. So long as George is on Trevlyn Farm, he is its sole master. But he is going to leave us, he says."

Mr. Chattaway turned to George, as if seeking confirmation or denial to the words. "Yes," answered George, quietly; "I

shall try to take a farm on my own account. You have one soon to be vacant that I should like, Mr. Chattaway."

"I have?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway. "There's no farm of mine likely to be vacant that would suit your pocket. You *can't* mean that you are casting your ambitious eyes to the Upland?" he added, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, I am," replied George. "I must have a talk with you about it. I should like the Upland Farm."

"Why, it would take——"

George did not wait to hear the conclusion of the sentence.

They were at that moment passing the parsonage, and Mr. Freeman, in a velvet skull-cap and slippers, was leaning over the gate. George turned to it, and checked his horse.

"Well, did he get safe off last night?" asked Mr. Freeman.

"Yes, at last. The train was forty minutes behind time."

"Ah! it's a shame they don't arrange matters so as to make that ten-o'clock train more punctual. Passengers have to be there at ten o'clock, because once in a way it *is* up to time; and often they are kept waiting half-an-hour. Did you and Rupert remain to see him off?"

"Yes," replied George.

"Then Rupert would be late home," observed the clergyman, turning to Mr. Chattaway, who had also reined in, and was sitting all ears open. "I hope you excused him, Mr. Chattaway, under the circumstances."

Mr. Chattaway said something in answer, very indistinctly, and the clergyman took it to imply that he *had* excused Rupert. George said good morning, and turned his horse onwards; they must make good speed, unless they would be "a day too late for the fair."

Not a syllable of the above conversation had Mr. Chattaway understood; it had been as Hebrew to him. He did not like the allusion of the clergyman to his "excusing the lateness of Rupert's return," for it proved that his harsh rule, touching Rupert's entrance at night, had become public property.

"I did not quite take Mr. Freeman," he said, turning equably to George, and speaking in careless accents. "Were you out last night with Rupert?"

"Yes. We spent the evening at the parsonage with Mr. Daw, and then went to see him off by the ten-o'clock train. It is a shame, as Mr. Freeman says, that the train is not made to keep better time. It was Mr. Daw's last night here."

"And therefore you and Rupert must spend it with him! It is a sudden friendship."

"I don't know that there's much friendship in the matter," replied George. "Rupert, I believe, was at the parsonage by appointment, but I called in accidentally. I did not know until I went in that Mr. Daw was leaving."

"Is he returning to France?"

"Yes. He crosses the Channel to-night. We shall never see him again, I expect; he said he should never more quit his home, so far as he believed."

"Is he a madman?"

"A madman!" echoed George Ryle. "Certainly not."

"He talked enough folly and treason for one."

"Run away with by his zeal, I suppose," remarked George. "No one paid any attention to him. Mr. Chattaway, do you think we Barbrook people could not raise a commotion about the irregularity of that ten-o'clock train, and so get it rectified?"

"Its irregularity does not concern me," returned Mr. Chattaway.

"It would if you had to travel by it; or to see friends off by it as I and Rupert had last night. Nearly forty-five minutes were we cooling our heels on the platform of the station. It must have been eleven o'clock when Rupert reached the Hold. I suppose he was let in."

"It appears he did get let in," replied Mr. Chattaway, in a tone which was by no means a genial one. "I don't know by whom yet; but I will know before to-night."

"If any one locked me out of my home, I should break the first window handy," cried bold Treve, who had been brought up by his mother in direct defiance of Mr. Chattaway, and would a great deal rather show him contempt than civility. "Rupert's a muff that he doesn't do it."

George urged on his horse. Words between Treve and Mr. Chattaway would not be agreeable, and the latter gentleman's face was turning fiery. "I am sure we shall be late," he cried. "Let us see what mettle our steeds are made of."

It diverted the anticipated dispute. Treve, who was impulsive at times, dashed on with a spring, and Mr. Chattaway and George followed. Before they reached Whitterbey, they fell in with other horsemen, farmers and gentlemen, bound on the same errand as themselves, and got separated.

Beyond a casual view of them now and then in the crowded

fair, Mr. Chattaway did not again see George and Treve until they all met at what was called the ordinary—the one-o'clock dinner. Of these ordinaries there were several held in the town on the great fair day, but Mr. Chattaway and George Ryle had been in the habit of attending the same. Immediately after the meal was over, Mr. Chattaway ordered his horse, and set off home.

It was earlier than he usually left, for the gentlemen liked to sit an hour or two after dinner at these annual meetings, and discuss the state of affairs in general, especially those relating to farming; but Mr. Chattaway intended to take Blackstone on his road home, and that would carry him some miles out of his way.

He did not arrive at Blackstone until five o'clock. Rupert had gone home; Cris, who had been playing at master all day in the absence of Mr. Chattaway, had also gone home, and only Ford was left. That Cris should have left, Mr. Chattaway thought nothing of; but his spirit angrily resented the departure of Rupert.

"It's coming to a pretty pass," he exclaimed, "if he thinks he can go and come at the hours he pleases. What has he been about to-day?"

"We have none of us done much to-day, sir," replied Ford. "There have been so many interruptions. They had Mr. Rupert before them at the inquest, and examined him——"

"Examined *him!*" interrupted Mr. Chattaway. "What about?"

"About the precautions taken for safety, and all that," rejoined Ford, who liked to launch a shaft or two at his master when he might do it without detection. "Mr. Rupert could not tell them much, though, as he was not in the habit of being down in the pit; and then they called some of the miners again."

"To what time is it adjourned?" growled Mr. Chattaway, after a pause.

"It's not adjourned, sir; it's over."

"Oh," said Mr. Chattaway, feeling a sort of relief. "What was the verdict?"

"The verdict, sir? Mr. Cris wrote it down, and took it up to the Hold for you."

"What was it? You can tell me its substance, I suppose."

"Well, it was 'Accidental death.' But there was something also about the absence of necessary precautions in the mine;

and a recommendation was added that you should therefore do something for the widows."

The very verdict that Chattaway had so dreaded! As is the case with many cowards, he *could not* feel independent of the opinion of his neighbours, and he knew the verdict would not be of good odour in their ears. And the suggestion that he should do something for the widows—it positively appalled him. Finding no reply, Ford continued.

"We had some gentlemen in here afterwards, sir. I don't know who they were; strangers: they said they must see you, so they are coming to-morrow. We were wondering whether they were Government inspectors, or anything of that sort. They asked when the second shaft to the pit was going to be begun."

"The second shaft to the pit!" repeated Mr. Chattaway.

"It's what they said," answered Ford. "But it will be a fine expense, if that has to be made."

An expense, the very suggestion of which turned that miserly heart cold. Mr. Chattaway thought the world was terribly against him, certainly, what with one source of annoyance and another, that day had not been one of pleasure. In point of fact, Mr. Chattaway was of too suspicious a nature ever to enjoy much ease. It may be thought that with the departure of the dreaded stranger, he would have experienced complete immunity from the fears which had latterly so shaken him. Not so; the departure had only served to augment them. He had been informed by Miss Diana on the previous night of Mr. Daw's proposed return to his distant home, of his having relinquished Rupert's cause, of his half apology for having ever taken it up; he had heard again from George Ryle this morning that the gentleman had actually gone. Most men would have accepted this as a welcome relief, a termination to the unpleasantness, and been thankful for it; but Mr. Chattaway, in his suspicious nature, doubted whether it did not mean treachery; whether it was not, in short, a ruse of the enemy. Terribly awakened were his fears that day. He suspected an ambush in every turn, a thief behind every tree; and he felt that he hated Rupert with a very bitter hatred.

Poor Rupert at that moment did not look like one to be either hated or dreaded, could Mr. Chattaway have seen him through some telescope. When Mr. Chattaway was sitting in his arm-chair in his office, Ford meekly standing by to be questioned, Rupert was toiling on foot towards Trevlyn Hold.

In his good nature he had left his pony at home for the benefit of Edith and Emily Chattaway. Since its purchase, they had not ceased teasing him to let them try it, and he had this day complied, and walked to Blackstone. He looked pale, worn, weary; his few days of riding to and fro had unfitted him for the walk, at least in inclination, and Rupert seemed to feel the fatigue this evening more than ever.

That day had not brought satisfaction to Rupert, any more than it had to Mr. Chattaway. It was impossible but that his hopes should have been excited by the movement—it may be said the boasts—made by Mr. Daw; slightly, if in no very great degree. And now they were over. That gentleman had taken his departure for good, and the hopes had faded, and there was an end to it altogether. Rupert had felt it keenly that morning as he walked to Blackstone; had felt that he and hope had bid adieu to each other for ever. Was his life to be passed at the work of that dreary mine?—was he never to rise from it? It seemed not. The day, too, was spent even more unpleasantly than usual, for Cris was in one of his overbearing moods, and goaded Rupert's spirit almost to explosion. Had Rupert been the servant of Cris Chattaway, the latter could not have treated him with more complete contempt and unkindness than he did this day. I don't say that Rupert did not provoke him. Cris asked him in a friendly manner enough who let him in to the Hold the previous night, and Rupert answered that it was no business of his. Cris then insisted upon knowing, but Rupert only laughed at him; and so Cris, in his petty spite, paid him out for it, and made the day one long humiliation to Rupert. Rupert reached home at last, and took his tea with the family. He kissed Mrs. Chattaway ten times, and whispered to her that he had kept counsel, and that he would never, never, for her sake, be late again.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ILL-OMENED CHASTISEMENT.

It was growing dusk on this same night, and Rupert Trevlyn stood in the rick-yard, talking to Jim Sanders. Rupert had been paying a visit to his pony in the stable, to see that it was alive after the exercise the young ladies had given it,—not a

little, by all accounts. The nearest way from the stables to the *front* of the house was through the rick-yard, and Rupert was returning from his visit of inspection when he came upon Jim Sanders, leaning his back against a hay-rick. Mr. Jim had stolen up to the Hold on a little private matter of his own. In his arms was a little black puppy, very very young, as might be known by the faint squeaks it made.

"Halloa, Jim! Is that you?" exclaimed Rupert, having some trouble to discern who it was in the fading light. "What have you got squeaking there?"

Jim displayed the little animal. "He's only a few days old, sir," said he, "but he's a fine fellow. Just look at his ears!"

"How am I to look?" rejoined Rupert. "It's almost pitch dark."

"Stop a bit," said Jim. He produced a sort of torch from underneath his smock-frock, and by some contrivance set it alight. The wood blazed away, sending up its flame in the yard, but they advanced into the wide open space, away from the ricks and from danger. These torches, cut from a peculiar wood, were common enough in the neighbourhood, and were found very useful on a dark night by those who had to go about any job of outdoor work. They gave the light of a dozen candles, and were not liable to be extinguished with every breath of wind. Dangerous things for a rick-yard, you will say: and so they were in incautious hands.

They moved to a safe spot at some distance from the ricks. The puppy lay in Rupert's arms now, and he took the torch in his hand, whilst he examined it. But not a minute had they thus stood, when some one came upon them with hasty steps. It was Mr. Chattaway. He had, no doubt, just returned from Blackstone, and was going in after leaving his horse in the stable. Jim Sanders disappeared, but Rupert stood his ground, the lighted torch still in his one hand, the puppy lying in the other.

"What are you doing here?" angrily demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"Not much," said Rupert. "I was only looking at this little puppy," showing it to Mr. Chattaway.

The puppy did not concern Mr. Chattaway. It could not work him treason, and Rupert was at liberty to look at it if he chose; but Mr. Chattaway would not let the opportunity slip of questioning him on another matter. It was the first time they had met, remember, since that little episode which had

so disturbed Mr. Chattaway in the morning—that of finding Rupert's boots.

"Pray where did you spend last evening?" he began.

"At the parsonage," freely answered Rupert; and Mr. Chattaway detected, or fancied he detected, defiant independence in the voice, which alone, to his ears, must speak of treason. "It was the last evening of Mr. Daw's stay there, and he asked me to spend it with him."

Mr. Chattaway saw no way of entering an opposition to this; he could not abuse him for taking tea at the parsonage; he could not well forbid it to him for the future. "What time did you come home?" he continued.

"It was eleven o'clock," avowed Rupert. "I went with Mr. Daw to the station to see him off, and the train was long behind its time. I thought it was coming up every minute, or I would not have stayed."

Mr. Chattaway had known as much before. "How did you get in?" he asked.

Rupert hesitated for a moment before speaking. "I was let in."

"I conclude you were. By whom?"

"I'd rather not tell, if you please."

"But I choose that you shall tell."

"No," said Rupert. "I can't tell that, Mr. Chattaway."

"But I insist on your telling," thundered Mr. Chattaway. "I order you to tell?"

He lifted his riding-whip, which was in his hand, menacingly as he spoke. Rupert stood his ground fearlessly, the expression of his face showing out calm and firm, as the torchlight fell upon it."

"Do you defy me, Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I don't wish to defy you, sir, but it is quite impossible that I can tell you who let me in last night. It would not be fair, or honourable."

His refusal may have looked like defiance to Mr. Chattaway, but in point of fact it was dictated by a far different feeling—regard for his aunt Edith. Had any one else in the Hold admitted him, he might have confessed to it, under Mr. Chattaway's stern command; but he would have died rather than bring *her*, whom he so loved, into trouble with her husband.

"Once more, sir, I ask you—will you tell me?"

"No, I will not," answered Rupert, with that quiet determination which imparts its own firmness stronger than any

bravado. Better for him that he had told! better even for Mrs. Chattaway.

Mr. Chattaway caught Rupert by the shoulder, lifted his whip, and struck him—struck him not once, but several times. The last stroke caught him in the face, and raised a thick weal across it; and then Mr. Chattaway, his work done, walked quickly away towards his house, never speaking, the whip resting quietly in his hand.

Alas, for the Trevlyn temper! Maddened by the outrage, smarting under the pain, the unhappy Rupert lost all self-command. Passion had never overcome him as it overcame him now. He knew not what he did; he was as one insane; in fact, he was insane for the time being—irresponsible (may it not so be said?) for his actions. With a yell of rage he picked up the torch, then blazing on the ground, dashed into the rick-yard as one possessed, and thrust the torch into the nearest rick. Then, leaping the opposite palings of the yard, he tore away across the fields.

Jim Sanders had been a witness to this: and to describe Jim's consternation would be beyond any pen. He had stood in the obscurity, out of reach of Mr. Chattaway's eyes, and had heard and seen all. Snatching the torch out of the rick—for the force with which Rupert had driven it in kept it there—Jim pulled out with his hands the few bits of hay already ignited, stamped on them, and believed the danger to be over. Next, he began to look for his puppy.

"Mr. Rupert can't have taken it off with him," soliloquized he, pacing the rick-yard dubiously with his torch, his eyes and ears alike on the alert. "He couldn't jump over them palings with that there puppy in his arms. It's a wonder that a delicate one like him could jump 'em at all, and come clean over 'em."

Mr. Jim Sanders was right: it was a wonder, for the palings were high. But it is known how strong madmen are, and I have told you that Rupert was one then.

Jim's search was interrupted by fresh footsteps, and Bridget, the maid you saw in the morning talking to Mr. Chattaway, accosted him. She was a cousin of Jim's, three or four years older than himself; but Jim was uncommonly fond of her, in a rustic fashion, deeming the difference of age nothing, and was always finding his way to the Hold with some mark of good will.

"Now, then! what do you want to-night?" cried she, for it

was the pleasure of her life to snub and domineer over him. "Hatch comes in just now, and says, says he, 'Jim Sanders is in the rick-yard, Bridget, a-waiting for you.' I'll make you know better, young Jim, than to send me in them messages before a kitchen-full."

"I've brought you a little present, Bridget," answered Jim. deprecatingly: and it was to make this offering which had taken Jim to the Hold. "It's the beautifullest puppy you ever see—if you'll only accept of him; as black and shiny as a lump of coal. Leastways, I had brought him," he added, in rueful accents. "But he's gone, and I can't find him."

Bridget had a weakness for puppies—as was known to Jim; consequently, the concluding part of his information was not palatable to her. She attacked him in regard to it.

"You have brought me the beautifullest puppy I ever see—and you have lost him and can't find him! What d'ye mean by that, young Jim? Can't you speak sense, so as a body may understand?"

Jim supposed he had worded his communication imperfectly. "There have been a row here," he explained, "and it frighted me so that I dun know what I be saying. The master, he took his riding-whip to Mr. Rupert and horsewhipped him."

"The master!" uttered the girl. "What! Mr. Chattaway?"

"He come through the yard when I was with Mr. Rupert a-showing him the puppy, and they had some words, and the master he horsewhipped him. I stood round the corner of the pales, frighted to death a'most for fear Chattaway should see me. And Mr. Rupert, he must have dropped the puppy somewhere, but I can't find him."

"Where is Mr. Rupert? How did it end?"

"He dashed into the yard and across to them palings, and he leaped 'em clean," responded Jim. "And he'd not have cleared 'em, Bridget, if he'd had the puppy in his arms, so I know it must be about somewhere. And he a'most set that there rick a-fire first," the boy added, lowering his voice to a whisper, and pointing in the direction of the particular rick, from which they had strayed some distance in Jim's search. "I pretty nigh dropped when I saw it catch alight."

Bridget felt awed, startled, but yet uncertain. "How could he set a rick a-fire, stupid?" she cried.

"With the torch. I had lighted it to show him the puppy, and he had it in his hand; he had it in his hand when Chattaway began to horsewhip him, but he dropped it then; and

when Chattaway went away, Mr. Rupert picked it up and pushed it into the rick."

"I don't like to hear this," said the girl, shivering. "Suppose the rick-yard had been set a-fire! Which rick was it? It mayn't——"

"Just hush a minute, Bridget!" suddenly interrupted Jim. "There he is!"

"There's who?" asked she, peering around her in the growing darkness. "Not master!"

"Law, Bridget! I meant the puppy. Can't you hear him? Them squeaks is his."

Guided towards the sound, Jim at length found the poor little animal. It was lying close to the spot where Rupert had leaped the palings. The boy took it up, fondling it almost as a mother would have fondled a child.

"See his pretty glossy skin, Bridget! just feel how sleek it is! He'll lap milk out of a saucer now! I tried him afore I brought him out; and if you——"

A scream from Bridget. Jim seemed to come in for nothing but shocks to his nerves this evening, and he almost dropped the puppy again. For it was a loud, shrill, prolonged scream, one carrying a strange amount of terror to the ear, as it went forth in the still night air.

Meanwhile Mr. Chattaway had entered his house. Some of the children who were in the drawing-room heard him come in, and went forth to the hall to welcome him after his long day's absence. But they were startled by the pallor of his countenance; it looked perfectly livid as the light of the hall-lamp fell upon it. Mr. Chattaway could not inflict such chastisement on Rupert without its emotional effects telling upon himself. He took off his hat, and laid his whip upon the table.

"We thought you would be home before this, papa."

"Where's your mamma?" he rejoined, paying no attention to their remark.

"She is upstairs in her sitting-room."

Mr. Chattaway turned to the staircase and ascended. Mrs. Chattaway was not in her room; but the sound of voices in Miss Diana's guided him to where he should find her. This sitting-room, devoted exclusively to Miss Diana Trevlyn, was on the side of the house next the rick-yard and farm buildings, which it overlooked.

The apartment was almost in darkness; the fire in the grate

had dimmed, and neither lamp nor candles had been lighted. Mrs. Chattaway and Miss Diana sat there conversing together.

"Who is this?" cried the former, looking round. "Oh, is it you, James? I did not know you were home again. What a fine day you have had for Whitterbey!"

Mr. Chattaway growled something about the day not having been particularly fine.

"Did you buy the stock you thought of buying?" asked Miss Diana.

"I bought some," he said, rather sulkily. "Prices ran high to-day."

"You are home late," she resumed.

"I came round by Blackstone."

It was evident by his tone and manner that he was in one of his least genial humours. Both the ladies knew from experience that the wisest plan at those times was to leave him to himself, and they resumed their own converse. Mr. Chattaway stood with his back to them, his hands in his pockets, his eyes peering out into the dusky night. Not in reality looking at anything, or attempting to look: he was far too deeply busied with his thoughts to pay attention to outward things.

He was beginning very slightly to repent of the horsewhipping, to doubt whether it might not have been more prudent had he abstained from inflicting it. As do many more of us, when we awake to reflection after some act committed in passion. If Rupert *was* to be dreaded; if he, in connection with others, was hatching treason, this outrage would only make of him a more bitter enemy. Better, perhaps, not to have gone to the extremity.

But it was done; it could not be undone; and to regret it were worse than useless. Mr. Chattaway began thinking of the point which had led to it—the refusal of Rupert to say who had admitted him. This at least Mr. Chattaway determined to ascertain.

"Did either of you let in Rupert last night?" he suddenly inquired, looking round.

"No, we did not," promptly replied Miss Diana, answering for Mrs. Chattaway as well as for herself, which she believed she was perfectly safe in doing. "He was not in until eleven, I hear; we went up to bed long before that."

"Then who did let him in?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway.

"One of the servants, of course," rejoined Miss Diana.

"But they say they did not," he answered.

"Have you asked them all?"

No. Mr. Chattaway remembered that he had not asked them all, and he came to the conclusion that one of them must have been the culprit. He turned to the window again, standing sulkily as before, and vowing in his own mind that the offender, whether man or woman, should be turned summarily out of the Hold.

"If you have been to Blackstone, you have heard that the inquest is over, James," observed Mrs. Chattaway, anxious to turn the conversation from the subject of last night. "Did you hear the verdict?"

"I heard it," he growled.

"It is not an agreeable verdict, Chattaway," remarked Miss Diana. "Better that you had made these improvements in the mine—as I urged upon you long ago—than wait to be forced to do them."

"I am not forced yet," retorted Chattaway. "They must—— Halloa! What's that?"

His sudden exclamation called them both to the window. A bright light, a blaze, was shooting up into the sky. At the same moment a shrill scream of terror—the scream from Bridget—arose with it.

"The rick-yard! the rick-yard!" exclaimed Miss Diana. "It is on fire!"

Mr. Chattaway stood for an instant as one paralyzed. The next he was leaping down the stairs, something like a yell bursting from him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLAZE.

There is a terror, which, from its very suddenness, shakes man's equanimity to its foundation—and that terror fell upon Trevlyn Hold. At the twilight hour of the evening—for it was not yet quite dark—its inmates were sitting mostly in idleness; the servants gossiping quietly in the kitchen, the young ladies lingering over the fire in the drawing-room; when those awful sounds of fear interrupted them—the cry of their father in the room above; the cry, shrill and prolonged, from outside the house. With a simultaneous movement, all flew to the

hall, only to see Mr. Chattaway leap down the stairs, followed by his wife and Miss Diana Trevlyn.

"Oh, papa! what is it? What is the matter?"

"The rick-yard is on fire!"

None of them knew who answered. It was not Mr. Chattaway's voice; it was not their mother's; it did not sound like Miss Diana's. A startled pause, and they ran out to the rick-yard, a terrified company. Little Edith Chattaway, a most excitable girl, fell into hysterics, and only added to the confusion of the scene.

The blaze was shooting upwards, and men were coming up from the out-buildings, as they gave vent to their dismay in various exclamations. One voice was heard distinctly above all the rest—that of Miss Diana Trevlyn.

"Who has done this? It must have been purposely set on fire."

She turned sharply on the group of servants as she spoke, as if suspecting one of them. The blaze fell on their alarmed faces, and they visibly recoiled; not from any consciousness of guilt, but from the general sense of fear which lay upon all. One of the grooms spoke impulsively.

"I heard voices not a minute ago in the rick-yard," he cried. "I'll swear I heard 'em. I was a-going across the top there to fetch a bucket of water from the pump for the stables, and I heard 'em talking. One was a woman's. I saw a light, too."

The women-servants were grouped together, staring helplessly at the blaze. Miss Diana directed her attention particularly to them: she had a ready perception, a keen sight, and she detected signs of terror so unmistakable in the face of one of them, that she could not help drawing a rapid conclusion. It was not the expression of general alarm, of surprise, of doubt depicted on the countenance of the rest; but an apprehensive, lively, conscious terror. The girl began endeavouring to draw behind, out of the sight of Miss Diana.

Miss Diana laid her hand upon her. It was Bridget, the kitchenmaid. "You know something of this!"

Bridget burst into tears. A more complete picture of helpless fear than she presented at that moment could not well be drawn. In her apron, held up as it seemed unconsciously, was something hidden.

"What have you got there?" sharply continued Miss Diana, whose thoughts may have flown to tow and matches, and other incendiary adjuncts.

Bridget, unable to speak, turned down the apron and disclosed a little black puppy: which, as if not liking to be displayed to general gaze, began to whine. There was nothing very guilty about him; but Bridget's sobs were redoubled.

"Were you in the rick-yard?" questioned Miss Diana; "was it your voice that Sam heard?" And Bridget was too terribly frightened to deny it.

"Then, pray, what were you doing? What brought you in the rick-yard at all?"

But Mrs. Chattaway, timid Mrs. Chattaway, who was trembling almost as much as Bridget, but who had compassion for every one in distress, came to the rescue. "Don't, Diana," she said. "I am sure Bridget is too good and honest a girl to have taken part in so dreadful a thing as this. The rick may have got heated and taken fire spontaneously."

"No, Madam, I'd die before I'd do such a thing," sobbed Bridget, in answer to the kindness. "If I was in the rick-yard, I wasn't doing no harm—and I'm sure I'd rather have went a hundred mile the other way if I'd thought what was going to happen. I turned sick with fright when I saw the flame burst out."

"Was it you who screamed?" inquired Miss Diana.

"I did scream, ma'am. I couldn't help it."

"Diana," whispered Mrs. Chattaway, "you may see she's innocent."

"Yes, most likely; but there's something behind for all that," replied Miss Diana, in her decisive tone. "Bridget, I mean to come to the bottom of this business, and the sooner you explain it, the less trouble you'll be at. I ask what took you to the rick-yard?"

"It wasn't no harm, ma'am, as Madam says," sobbed Bridget, evidently very unwilling to enter on the explanation. "Oh, ma'am! I never did no harm in going there, nor thought none."

"Then it is the more easily told," responded Miss Diana. "Do you hear me, girl? What business took you to the rick-yard, and who were you talking with?"

There appeared to be no help for it; Bridget had felt there would not be from the first; she should have to confess to her rustic admirer's stolen visit. And Bridget, while liking him in her heart, was intensely ashamed of him, from his being so much younger than herself.

"Ma'am, I only came into it for a minute to speak to a

young boy; my cousin, Jim Sanders. Hatch, he came into the kitchen and said young Jim wanted to see me, and I came out. That's all—if it was the last word I had to speak," she added, with a burst of grief.

"And Jim Sanders? What did he want with you?" pursued Miss Diana, with uncompromising sternness.

"It was to show me this puppy," returned Bridget, not choosing to confess that the small animal was brought as a present. "Jim seemed proud of it, he did, ma'am, and he brought it up for me to see."

A very innocent confession; plausible also; and Miss Diana saw no reason for disbelieving it. But she was one who liked to be on the sure side, and when corroborative testimony was to be had to a fact, she did not allow it to escape her. "One of you find Hatch," she said, addressing the maids.

Hatch was found with the men-servants and labourers, who were knocking over each other in their eager endeavours to carry water to the rick, under the frantic and confused directions of their master. Hatch's smock-frock was already wringing wet through the upsetting of a bucket over him. He came up to Miss Diana.

"Did you go into the kitchen, and tell Bridget that Jim Sanders wanted her in the rick-yard?" she questioned.

I think it has been mentioned once before that this man, Hatch, was too honest or too simple to answer anything but the straightforward truth. He replied that he did so; that he had been called to by Jim Sanders as he was passing along at the top of the rick-yard near the stables, who asked him to go to the house and send out Bridget.

"Did he say what he wanted with her?" continued Miss Diana.

"Not to me," replied Hatch. "It ain't nothing new for that there boy to come up and ask for Bridget, ma'am," he continued. "He's always coming up for her, Jim is. They be cousins."

A well-meant, good-natured speech, no doubt, on Hatch's part; but Bridget would have liked to box his ears for it there and then. Miss Diana, liberal-minded, sufficiently large-hearted, saw no reason to object to Mr. Jim's visits, provided they were paid at proper times and seasons, when the girl was not at her work. "Was any one with Jim Sanders?" she asked.

"Not as I saw, ma'am. As I was coming back after telling Bridget, I see Jim a-waiting there, all by hisself. He——"

"How could you see him? Was it not too dark? interrupted Miss Diana.

"Not then. Bridget, she kep' him waiting ever so long afore she came out. Jim must 'a' been a good half-hour altogether in the yard; 'twere that, I know, from the time he called me till the blaze burst out. But Jim might have went away afore that," added Hatch, reflectively.

"That's all, Hatch; make haste back again," said Miss Diana. "Now, Bridget," she resumed, "was Jim Sanders in the yard when the flames burst out, or was he not?"

"Yes, ma'am, he was there."

"Then if any suspicious characters got into the rick-yard and did the mischief, he would no doubt have seen them," thought Miss Diana, to herself. "Do you know who did set it on fire?" she impatiently asked.

Bridget's face, which had regained some of its colour, grew white again—white as the apron she wore. Should she dare to tell what she had heard about Rupert? "I did not see it done," she gasped.

"Come, Bridget, this will not do," cried Miss Diana, noting the signs. "There's more behind, I see. Where's Jim Sanders?"

She looked around as she spoke—looked into the obscurity, into the light and shade cast by the flames. Jim was certainly not in sight. "Do you know where he is?" she sharply resumed to Bridget.

But instead of answering, Bridget was taken with a fresh fit of shivering. It amazed Miss Diana considerably

"Did Jim do it?" she sharply asked.

"No, no," answered Bridget, bursting into fresh tears. "When I got to Jim he had somehow lost the puppy"—glancing down at her apron—"and we had to look about for it. It was only just in the minute he found it that the flames broke forth. Jim, he was showing of it to me, ma'am, and he started like anything when I shrieked out."

"Could he not see them as well as you?" cried Miss Diana.

"He had his back to 'em and I had my face," answered Bridget.

"And where is Jim Sanders? What has become of him?"

"I don't know," sobbed Bridget. "Jim, he seemed like one dazed when he turned and saw the blaze. He stood a minute looking at it, and I could see his face turn all of a fright; the blaze made it light enough to see anything; and then he flung

the puppy into my arms and scrambled off over the palings, never speaking a word."

Miss Diana paused. There was something suspicious in Jim's making off in the clandestine manner described; it struck her so at once. On the other hand she had known Jim from his infancy—known him to be of a harmless, inoffensive nature.

"An honest lad would have remained to see what assistance he could render towards putting it out, not have run off in that cowardly way," spoke Miss Diana. "Bridget, girl, I don't like the look of this."

Bridget made no reply, except by her tears. She was beginning to wish the ground would open and swallow her up for a convenient half-hour; she wished Jim Sanders had been actually buried in it before he had brought this trouble upon her. Miss Diana, Madam, and the young ladies were surrounding her; the maid-servants began to edge away from her suspiciously; even Miss Edith had ceased her sobs and her hysterics to stare at Bridget.

Cris Chattaway came leaping past them. Cris, who had been leisurely making his way to the Hold—very near it, in fact, when the flames broke out—had just come up, and after a short conference with his father, was now running to the stables. "You are a fleet horseman, Cris," Mr. Chattaway had said to him: "get the engines here from Barmester." And Cris was hastening to mount a horse, and ride away on the errand.

Mrs. Chattaway caught his arm as he passed. "Oh, Cris, this is dreadful! What can have caused it?"

"What!" returned Cris, in a savage tone—not, however, meant for his mother, but induced by the subject. "Don't you know what has caused it? He ought to swing for it, the felon!"

Mrs. Chattaway was surprised. She connected his words with what she had just been listening to. "Cris!—do you mean—— It never could have been Jim Sanders!"

"Jim Sanders!" slightingly spoke Cris. "What should have put Jim Sanders in your head, mother? No; it was your favoured nephew, Rupert Trevlyn?"

Mrs. Chattaway broke into a cry as the words came from his lips. Maude started a step forward, her face full of indignant protestation; and Miss Diana imperiously demanded what he meant.

"Don't stop me," said Cris. "Rupert Trevlyn was in the yard with a torch just before it broke out, and he must have fired it."

"It can't be, Cris!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, her accent one of intense pain, and she laid hold of her son as he was speeding away. "Who says this?"

Cris twisted himself from her. "I can't stop, mother, I say, I am going for the engines. You had better ask my father; it was he told me. It's true enough: who *would* do it, except Rupert?"

The shaft lanced at Rupert struck to the heart of Mrs. Chattaway; it struck unpleasantly on the ear of Miss Diana Trevlyn; it did not sound agreeably to some of the women-servants. Rupert was liked in the household, Cris hated. One of the latter spoke up in her zeal.

"It's well, it is, to try to throw it off the shoulders of that Jim Sanders on to Mr. Rupert! Jim Sanders——"

"And what have you got to say agin' Jim Sanders?" interrupted Bridget, aroused by the innuendo—fearful, it may be, of a danger that the crime should be fastened on him. "Perhaps if I had spoke my mind, I could have told as it was Mr. Rupert as well as others could; perhaps Jim Sanders could have told it, too. At any rate, it wasn't——"

"What is that, Bridget?"

The quiet but most imperative interruption came from Miss Diana. Bridget fell on her knees; excitement was overpowering her. "It was Mr. Rupert, ma'am; it was; Jim saw him fire it."

"Diana! Diana! I feel ill," gasped Mrs. Chattaway, in a faint tone. "Let me go to him; I cannot breathe under this suspense."

She meant to her husband. Pressing across the confused and crowded rick-yard—for people, aroused by the sight of the flames, were coming up now in numbers—she succeeded in gaining Mr. Chattaway. Maude, scared nearly to death, followed her closely. She caught him just as he had taken a bucket of water to hand on to some one standing next him in the line, thereby causing him to spill it. Mr. Chattaway turned with a passionate word.

"What do you want here?" he roughly asked, although he saw it was his wife.

"James, tell me," she pleadingly whispered. "I felt sick with suspense; I could not wair. What did Cris mean by saying it was Rupert."

"It was," answered Mr. Chattaway. "There's not a shadow of doubt that it was Rupert. He has done it in revenge."

"Revenge for what?" she asked.

"For the horsewhipping I gave him. When I joined you upstairs just now, I came straight from it. I horsewhipped him here, on this very spot," continued Mr. Chattaway, as if it afforded him satisfaction to repeat his avowal of the fact. "He had a torch with him, and I—like a fool—left it with him, never thinking of consequences, or that he might use it to become a felon. He must have fired the rick in revenge."

Mrs. Chattaway had been gradually drawing away from the proximity of the blaze; from the line formed to pass buckets for water on to the flames, which crackled and roared on high; from the crowd and confusion that prevailed around the spot. Mr. Chattaway had drawn with her, leaving his place in the line to be filled up by another. She fell against a distant rick, feeling sick unto death.

"Oh, James! Why did you horsewhip him? What had he done?"

"I horsewhipped him for insolence; for bearding me to my face. I bade him tell me who let him in last night when he returned home, and he set me at defiance by refusing to tell. One of my servants must be a traitor, and Rupert is screening him."

A great cry escaped her. "Oh, what have you done? It was I who let him in."

"*You!*" foamed Mr. Chattaway. "It is not true," he added, the next moment. "You are striving also to deceive me—to defend him."

"It is true," she answered. "I saw him come to the house from my dressing-room window, and I went down the back-stairs and opened the door for him. If he refused to betray me, it was done in good-feeling, in love towards me, lest you should reproach me. And you have horsewhipped him for it!—you have goaded him on to this crime! Oh, Rupert! my darling Rupert!"

Mr. Chattaway turned impatiently away; he had no time to waste on sentiment when his ricks were burning. His wife detained him.

"It has been a wretched mistake altogether, James," she whispered. "Say you will forgive him—forgive him for my sake!"

"Forgive him!" repeated Mr. Chattaway, his voice assuming quite a hissing sound in his anger. "Forgive this? Never. I'll prosecute him to the extremity of the law; I'll try hard

to get him condemned to penal servitude for life. Forgive *this!* You are out of your mind, Madam Chattaway."

Her breath was coming shortly, her voice rose amidst sobs, and she entwined her arms about him caressingly, imploringly, in her agony of distress and terror.

"For my sake, my husband! It would kill me to see it brought home to him. He must have been overcome by a fit of the Trevlyn temper. Oh, James! forgive him for my sake."

"I never will," deliberately replied Mr. Chattaway. "I tell you that I will prosecute him to the utmost limit of the law; I swear it. In an hour's time from this he will be in custody."

He broke from her, and she staggered against the rick. But for Maude she might have fallen. Poor Maude, who had stood and listened, her face turning to stone, her heart to despair.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A NIGHT SCENE.

ALAS for the Trevlyn temper! How many times has the regret to be repeated! Were the world filled with lamentations for this most unhappy state of mind to which some of its mortals give way, they could not atone for the ill inflicted. It is not a pleasant topic to enlarge upon, and I seem to have lingered unnecessarily in dislike to approach it.

When Rupert leaped the palings and flew away over the field, he was totally incapable of self-government for the time being. I do not say this in extenuation. I say that such a state of things is most lamentable, and ought not to be. I only state that it was so. The most passionate temper ever born with man *may* be kept under, where the right means are used —prayer, ever-watchful self-control, stern determination; but how few there are who find the means! Rupert Trevlyn did not. He had no clear perception of what he had done; he probably knew that he had thrust the blazing torch into the rick; but he gave no thought whatever to consequences, whether the hay was undamaged or whether it should burst forth into a flame.

He flew over the field as one possessed; he flew over a succession of fields; the high-road intervened, and he was

passing over it in his reckless career, when he was encountered by Farmer Apperley. Not, for a moment, did the farmer recognize Rupert.

"Hey, lad! What in the name of fortune has taken you?" cried he, laying his hand upon him.

His face distorted with passion, his eyes starting with fury, Rupert tore on. He shook the farmer's hand off him, and pressed on, leaping the low dwarf hedge opposite, and never speaking.

Mr. Apperley began to doubt whether he had not been deceived by some strange apparition—such, for instance, as the popular Flying Dutchman. He ran to a stile, and stood there gazing after the mad figure, which seemed to be flying about heedlessly, without purpose. It had not gone out of the field: now in one part of it, now in another: and Mr. Apperley rubbed his eyes and tried to penetrate more clearly the obscurity of the night.

"It *was* Rupert Trevlyn—if I ever saw him," decided he, at length. "What can have put him into this state? Perhaps he's gone mad!"

The farmer, in his consternation, stood there he knew not how long: ten minutes it may have been. It was not a busy night with him, and he would as soon linger at that gate as go on at once to Bluck the farrier—where he was bound to. Any time would do to give his orders to Bluck.

"Well, I can't make it out a bit," soliloquized he, when he at length turned away. "I'm sure it was Rupert; but what could have put him into that state? Halloa? what's that?"

A bright light in the direction of Trevlyn Hold had caught his eye. He stood and gazed at it in a second state of consternation equal to that in which he had just gazed after Rupert Trevlyn. "If I don't believe it's a fire!" ejaculated he.

Was every one running about madly? The words were escaping Mr. Apperley's lips when a second figure, white, breathless as the other, came flying over the road in the self-same spot. This one wore a smock-frock, and the farmer recognized Jim Sanders.

"Why, Jim, is it you? What's up?"

"Don't stop me, sir," panted Jim. "Don't you see the blaze there? It's Chattaway's rick-yard."

"Mercy on me! Chattaway's rick-yard! What has done it? Have we got the incendiaries in the county again?"

"It was Mr. Rupert," answered Jim, dropping his voice

to a whisper. "I see him fire it. Let me get on, please, sir."

In very astonishment, Mr. Apperley loosed his hold of the boy, who went speeding off in the direction of Barbrook. The farmer propped his back against the stile, that he might gather together his scared senses.

Rupert Trevlyn had fired the rick-yard! Had he really gone mad?—or was Jim Sanders mad when he said it? The farmer, a slow man to arrive at conclusions, was sorely puzzled. "The one looked as mad as t'other, for what I saw," deliberated he. "Any way, however, there's the fire, and I'd better make my way to it: they'll want hands if they are to put that out. Thank God, it's a calm night!"

He took the nearest way to the Hold; another helper amidst the many now crowding the busy scene. What a Babel of confusion it was!—what a scene for a painting, could it have been transferred to canvas!—what a life's remembrance! The noise of the excited men as they passed the buckets; the deep interjections of Mr. Chattaway; and the faces of the lookers-on, turned up to the lurid flame. Farmer Apperley, a man more given to deeds than words, rendered what help he could, speaking to none.

He had been at work some time, when a shout broke simultaneously from the spectators. The next rick had caught fire. Mr. Chattaway uttered a despairing word, and the workers ceased for a few moments their efforts—as if paralyzed with the additional evil.

"If the fire-engines would only come!" impatiently exclaimed Mr. Chattaway.

Even as he spoke a faint rumbling was heard in the distance. It came nearer and nearer; its reckless pace proclaiming it to be a fire-engine. And Mr. Chattaway, in spite of his remark of impatience, gazed at its approach with astonishment; for he knew there had not been time for the Barmester engines to arrive.

It proved to be the little engine from Barbrook, one kept in the village. A very despised engine indeed; from its small size, one rarely called for; and which Mr. Chattaway had not so much as thought of, when sending for the superior engines from Barmester. On it came, glibly, as if it meant to do good service, and the crowd in the rick-yard welcomed it with a shout, and parted to give it space.

Churlish as was Mr. Chattaway's general manner, he could

not avoid showing somewhat of his satisfaction at its arrival. "I am so glad you have come!" he exclaimed. "I never thought to send to you. I suppose you saw the flames, and came of your own accord?"

"No, sir, we never saw nothing," was the reply of the man he addressed. "Mr. Ryle's lad, Jim Sanders, came for us. I never see a chap in such a commotion; he a'most got the engine ready hisself."

The mention of the name, Jim Sanders, caused a buzz around. The acknowledgment of the kitchen-maid Bridget, that the offender was Rupert Trevlyn, had been whispered and commented upon; and if some were found to believe the whisper, others scornfully rejected it. There was Mr. Chattaway's assertion, also, that it was Rupert; but Mr. Chattaway's ill-will to Rupert was remembered that night, and the assertion was received doubtfully. A meddlesome voice interrupted the fireman.

"Jim Sanders! why that was the one what fired it. There ain't no doubt he did. Little wonder he seemed frighted."

"Did he fire it?" interrupted Farmer Apperley, eagerly. "What, Jim? Why, what possessed him to do such a thing? I met him just now, like one frightened out of his life, and he laid the guilt on Rupert Trevlyn."

"Hush, Mr. Apperley!" whispered a cautioning voice at his elbow, and the farmer turned to see George Ryle. The latter, with an almost imperceptible movement, directed his attention to the right, to the livid face of Mrs. Chattaway. As one paralyzed stood she, her hands clasped, listening to the words.

"Yes, it was Mr. Rupert," protested Bridget, with a sob. "Jim Sanders told me that he watched Mr. Rupert thrust the lighted torch into the rick. He seemed not to know what he was about, Jim said; he seemed to do it in a passion."

"Hold your tongue, Bridget," interposed a sharp commanding voice. "Have I not desired you already to do so? It is not upon the hearsay evidence of Jim Sanders that you can accuse Mr. Rupert."

The speaker was Miss Diana Trevlyn. In good truth, Miss Diana did not believe that Rupert could have been guilty of the act. It had been disclosed that the torch in the rick-yard belonged to Jim Sanders, had been brought there by him, and she deemed that fact suspicious against Jim. Miss Diana had arrived unwillingly at the conclusion that Jim Sanders had set the rick on fire by accident; and in his fright had accused

Rupert, to screen himself. She imparted her view of the affair to Mr. Apperley.

"Like enough," was the response of Mr. Apperley when he had listened. "Some of these boys have no more caution in 'em than if they were children of two years old. But what could have put Rupert into such a state?" he added; the thought occurring to him, "If anybody ever looked mad, he did this night."

"When?" asked Miss Diana, eagerly, and Mrs. Chattaway pressed up closer with her white countenance.

"I saw him just before I came up here. I was on my way to Bluck's, and somebody with a white face, breathless and panting, came bursting through the hedge right across my path. I did not know him at first; he didn't look a bit like Rupert; but when I saw who it was, I tried to stop him, and I asked what was the matter. He shook me off, and went over the opposite hedge like a wild animal, and there he tore about the field. If he had been a lunatic escaped from the county asylum, he couldn't have run at greater speed."

"Did he say nothing?" some voice interrupted.

"Not a word," replied the farmer. "He did not look as if he could speak. Well, before I had digested that shock, or come to any manner of reflection as to what it could mean, there came another, flying up in the same mad state, and that was Jim Sanders. I stopped *him.* Nearly at the same time, or just before it, I had seen a light shoot up towards the sky. Jim said as well as he could talk for fright, that the rick-yard at the Hold was on fire, and that Mr. Rupert had set it alight."

"At all events, the mischief seems to lie between them," remarked some voices around.

There would have been no time for this desultory conversation—at least, for the gentlemen's share in it—but that the fire-engine had put a stop to their efforts. It had planted itself on the very spot where the line had been formed, scattering those who had taken part in it, and was rapidly getting itself into working order. The flames were shooting up terribly now, and Mr. Chattaway was rushing here, there, and everywhere, in his frantic but impotent efforts to subdue them. He was not insured.

George Ryle approached Mrs. Chattaway, and bent over her, a strange tone of kindness in his every word: it seemed to suggest how conscious he was of the great sorrow that was

coming upon her. "I wish you would let me take you indoors," he whispered. "Indeed it is not well for you to be here."

"Where is he?" she gasped, in answer. "Could you find him, and remove him from danger?"

A conviction, sure and not to be shaken, had been upon her from the very moment that her husband had avowed his chastisement of Rupert—the conviction that it was he, Rupert, and no other, who had done the mischief. Her own brothers—chiefly, however, her brother Rupert—*had* been guilty of one or two acts almost as mad in their passion. He could not help his temper, she reasoned—some, perhaps, may say wrongly; and if Mr. Chattaway had provoked him by that sharp and insulting punishment, it was he who was in fault more than Rupert.

"I would die to save him, George," she whispered. "I would give all I am worth to save him from the consequences. Mr. Chattaway says he will prosecute him to the last."

"I am quite sure you will be ill if you stay here," remonstrated George, for she was shivering from head to foot; not, however, with cold, but with emotion. "I will go with you to the house, and talk to you there."

"To the house!" she repeated. "Do you suppose I could stay in the house to-night? Look at them; they are all out here."

She pointed to her children; to the women-servants. It was even so: all were out there. Mr. Chattaway, in passing, had once or twice sharply demanded what they, a pack of women, did in a scene such as that, and the women had drawn away at the rebuke, but only to come forward again. Perhaps it was not in human nature to keep wholly away from that scene of excitement.

A half-exclamation of fear escaped Mrs. Chattaway's lips, and she pressed a few steps onwards.

Holding a close and apparently private conference with Mr. Apperley, was Bowen, the superintendent of the very slight staff of police stationed in the place.

As a general rule, these rustic districts are too peaceable to require much supervision from the men in blue.

"Mr. Apperley, you will not turn against him!" she implored, from between her fevered and trembling lips; and in good truth, Mrs. Chattaway gave indications of being almost as much beside herself that night as was the unhappy Rupert.

"Is Bowen asking you where you saw Rupert, that he may go and find him? Do not *you* turn against him!"

"My dear, good lady, I haven't a thing to tell," returned Mr. Apperley, looking at her in surprise, for her manner was very strange. "Bowen heard me say, as everybody else within some feet around us heard me, that Mr. Rupert was in the Brook field when I came from it. But I have nothing else to tell of him; and he may not be there now. It's hardly likely that he should be."

Mrs. Chattaway lifted her white face to Bowen. "You will not take him?" she imploringly whispered.

The man shook his head—he was an intelligent officer, much respected in the neighbourhood—and answered her in the same low tone, "I can't help myself, ma'am. When charges are given to us, we are obliged to take cognizance of them, and to arrest, if need be, those implicated."

"Has this charge been given you?" she asked.

"Yes, this half-hour ago. I was up here almost with the breaking out of the flames, for I happened to be close by, and Mr. Chattaway made his formal complaint to me, and put it in my charge."

Her heart sank within her. "And you are looking for him?"

"Chigwell is," replied the superintendent, alluding to a policeman. "And Dumps is gone to see after Jim Sanders."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed a voice at her elbow. It was that of George Ryle; and Mrs. Chattaway turned to him in amazement. But George's words had not borne reference to her, or to anything she was saying.

"It is beginning to rain," he exclaimed. "A fine, steady rain would do us more good than the engines. What does that noise mean?"

A murmur of excitement had arisen on the opposite side of the rick-yard, and was spreading as fast as did the flame. George looked in vain for its cause: he was very tall, and raised himself on tiptoe to see the better: as yet without result.

But not for long. The cause soon showed itself. Pushing his way through the rick-yard, pale, subdued, quiet now, came Rupert Trevlyn. Not in custody; not fettered; not passionate; only very worn and weary, as if he had undergone some painful amount of fatigue. It was only that the fit of passion had left him; he was worn-out, weary, powerless. In the days gone by it had so left his uncle Rupert.

Mr. Bowen walked up, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "I am sorry to do it, sir," he said, "but you are my prisoner."

"I can't help it," wearily responded Rupert.

But what brought Rupert Trevlyn back into the very camp of the Philistines? Rupert, in his terrible passion, had partly fallen to the ground, partly flung himself down in the field where Mr. Apperley saw him, and there he lay until the passion abated. Then he gathered himself up so far as to sit, and bent his head upon his knees, and revolved what had passed. How long he might have stopped there, it is impossible to say, but that shouts and cries in the road aroused him, and he lifted his head to see that red light, and men running in its direction. He went and questioned them. "The rick-yard at the Hold was on fire!"

An awful consciousness came across him that it was *his* work. It is a fact, that he did not positively remember what he had done: that is to say, had no very clear recollection of it. Giving no thought to consequences, to himself—any more than he had an hour before given thought to the consequences of his work—he began to hasten to the Hold as fast as his depressed physical state would permit. If he had caused that flame, it was only fair that he should do what he could towards putting it out.

The clouds cleared away, and the rain did not fulfil its promise as George Ryle had fondly hoped. But the little engine from Barbrook did good service, and the flames were not spreading over the whole rick-yard. Later, the two great Barmester engines thundered up, and gave their aid towards the extinguishing of the fire.

And Rupert Trevlyn was in custody for having caused it!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NORA'S DIPLOMACY.

AMIDST all the human beings collected in and about the burning rick-yard of Trevlyn Hold, perhaps no one was so intensely miserable, not even excepting the unhappy Rupert, as its mistress, Mrs. Chattaway. *He* stood there in custody for a dark crime; a crime for which the punishment only a few short years before would have been the extreme penalty of the

law; he whom she had so loved. In her chequered life of pain she had experienced moments of unhappiness than which she had thought no future could exceed them in intensity; but had all those moments been concentrated into one dark and dreadful hour, it could not have equalled the trouble of this. The confusion of the scene, its noise, its bustle, its moving mass of humanity, its red light, now dim and apparently subdued, now shooting up with renewed glare, moved before her actual sight as scenes in a phantasmagoria, even as the dread consequences moved before the sight of her mind. Her vivid imagination leaped over the present, and held up to her view but one appalling picture of the future—Rupert working in chains. Poor, unhappy, wronged Rupert! whom they had kept out of his rights; whom her husband had now by his personal ill-treatment goaded to the ungovernable passion which was the curse of her family: and this was the result.

Every pulse of her heart beating with its sense of the terrible wrong; every chord of love for Rupert strung to its utmost tension; every fear that an excitable imagination can depict raised up within her, Mrs. Chattaway leaned against the palings at the upper part of the yard in utter faintness of spirit. Her ears took in with unnatural quickness the free comments around. Under shelter of an obscure light, making part of a busy crowd, people will speak out opinions that they might shrink from proclaiming in broad noonday. She heard some hotly avow their belief that Rupert was not guilty, except in the malicious fancy of Mr. Chattaway; she heard them say that Chattaway was "all scared like," that past day when he found that Rupert was alive, instead of dead, down in the mine: even the more moderate ones observed that after all it was only Jim Sanders's word for it; and that if Jim did not appear to confirm it, Mr. Rupert must be held innocent.

The wonder appeared to be, where was Jim? He had not reappeared on the scene, and his absence certainly wore a suspicious look. In moments of intense fear, the mind receives the slightest word, the barest hint, vividly and comprehensively, and Mrs. Chattaway's heart bounded within her at that whispered suggestion. *If Jim Sanders did not appear to confirm his word Rupert must be held innocent.* Was there no possibility of keeping Jim back? By persuasion—by stratagem—by force, even, if necessary? The blood came mounting to her pale cheek at the thought, red as the lurid flame which lighted up the air. At that moment she saw George Ryle hastening

across the yard near to her. She glided towards him, and he turned in answer to her call.

"You see! They have taken Rupert!"

"Do not distress yourself, dear Mrs. Chattaway," he answered. "I wish you could have been persuaded not to remain in this scene: it is altogether unfit for you."

"George," she gasped, "do *you* believe he did it?"

George Ryle did believe it. He had heard about the horse-whipping; and, knowing of that mad and evil passion called the Trevlyn temper, he could not do otherwise than believe it.

"Ah, don't speak!" she interrupted, perceiving his hesitation. "I see you condemn him, as some of those around us are condemning. But," she added, with feverish eagerness, "there is only the word of Jim Sanders against him. They are saying so."

"Very true," replied George, in hearty tones, desiring to give her any comfort that he could. "Mr. Jim must make good his words before we can condemn Rupert."

"Mamma, Jim Sanders has always been looked upon as truthful," interposed Octave Chattaway, who had drawn near. Surely, it was ill-natured to say so at that moment, however indisputable the fact might be!

"It has to be proved yet that Jim did make the accusation," said George, in reply to Octave. "It is not obliged to be the fact, although Bridget asserts it. And even if Jim did say it, he may have been mistaken. He must show that he was not mistaken before the magistrates to-morrow, or the charge will fall to the ground."

"And Rupert be released?" added Mrs. Chattaway, in suspicious eagerness.

"Certainly. At least, I should suppose so."

He passed on his way; Octave went back to where she had been standing, and Mrs. Chattaway remained alone, buried in thought.

A few minutes, and she stole out of the yard. With stealthy steps, and eyes that glanced fearingly around her lest her movements should be watched, she escaped by degrees beyond the crowd, and emerged in the open field. Then, turning an angle at a fleet pace—as if, now that she was out of the reach of prying eyes, she would lose no time on the errand she was bound—she ran against some one who was coming swiftly up. Mrs. Chattaway's heart-blood coursed on with violence, and a low cry escaped her. It seemed, in her self-consciousness, that

the mere fact of being encountered like this, was sufficient to betray the wild project she had conceived and was now bent on. Conscience is very suggestive.

But it was only Nora Dickson: and Nora in a state of overflowing wrath. When the alarm that there was a fire at the Hold reached Trevlyn Farm, its inmates had hastened out to the scene with one accord, leaving none in the house but Nora and Mrs. Ryle. Mrs. Ryle, suffering from some temporary indisposition, was in bed, and Nora, in consequence, had to stay and take care of the house, doing grievous violence to her curiosity. She stood leaning over the gate, watching the people hasten by to the delightful scene of excitement from which she was per force excluded; and when the Barbrook engine thundered past, Nora danced with impotent anger. She felt half inclined to lock up the house, and Mrs. Ryle, and start in the wake of the engine; the fierce if innocent anathemas she hurled at the head of the unconscious and truant Nanny, were something formidable; and when that damsel at length found her way back, Nora would have experienced the greatest satisfaction in shaking her. But the bent of her indignation changed; for Nanny, before Nora had had time to visit it upon her by so much as a word, burst forth with the news she had gathered at the Hold. It was Rupert Trevlyn who fired the hayrick, because Mr. Chattaway had horsewhipped him.

Nora's breath was taken away: wrath for her own grievance was merged in the greater wrath she felt for the sake of Rupert. Horsewhipped him? That brute of a Chattaway had horsewhipped Rupert Trevlyn! A burning glow rushed over her as she listened; a resentful denial broke from her lips: but Nanny persisted that her statement was correct. Chattaway had locked out Rupert the previous night, and Madam, unknown to her husband, admitted him: Chattaway had demanded of Rupert who let him in, but Rupert, fearing to compromise Madam, refused to tell, and then Chattaway used the horsewhip.

Nora waited to hear no more. She started off to the Hold in her strong indignation; not so much now to take part in the bustling scene going on there, or to indulge her curiosity, as to ascertain the truth of this shameful story. Rupert could scarcely have felt more indignant pain at the chastisement, than Nora felt at hearing it. Close to the outer gate of the fold-yard, she encountered Mrs. Chattaway.

A short explanation ensued. Nora, forgetting possibly in her heart that it was Mrs. Chattaway to whom she spoke, broke into a burst of indignation at Mr. Chattaway, a flood of sympathy for Rupert. It told Mrs. Chattaway that she might trust her, trust her fully, and her delicate fingers entwined themselves nervously around Nora's stronger ones in her hysterical emotion.

"It must have been done in a fit of the Trevlyn temper, Nora," she whispered imploringly, as if beseeching Nora's clemency for him. "The temper was born with him, you know, Nora, and he could not help that—and to be horse-whipped is a terrible thing."

If Nora felt inclined to doubt the report before, these words dispelled the doubt, and brought to her a momentary shock. Nora was not one to excuse or extenuate a crime so great as that of wilfully setting fire to a rick-yard: to all who have to do with farms, with rick-yards, it is especially abhorrent, and Nora was no exception to the rule. But in this case she did, by some ingenious sophistry of her own, shift the blame from Rupert's shoulders, and lay it on Mr. Chattaway's; and she again expressed her opinion of that gentleman's conduct in pretty plain terms.

"He is in custody, Nora!" said Mrs. Chattaway with a shiver. "He is to be examined to-morrow before the magistrates, and they will either commit him for trial, or release him, according to the evidence. Should he be tried and condemned for it, the punishment might be penal servitude for life."

"Heaven help him!" ejaculated Nora in her dismay at this new feature presented to her view. "That would be a climax to his unhappy life!"

"But if they can prove nothing against him to-morrow, the magistrates will not commit him," resumed Mrs. Chattaway, who had scarcely paused to give time for Nora's observation. "There's nothing against him; nothing to prove it but Jim Sanders's word: and—Nora,"—she feverishly added—"perhaps we can keep Jim back?"

"Jim Sanders's word!" repeated Nora, who as yet had not heard of Jim's word in connection with the affair. "What has Jim to do with it?"

Mrs. Chattaway explained. She mentioned all that was said to have passed, Bridget's declaration, and her own miserable conviction that it was but too true. She just spoke of the suspicion cast on Jim himself by several doubters, but in a

slighting way, which proved that the suspicion found no weight with her; and she told of his disappearance from the scene. "I was on my way to search for him," she continued; "but I don't know where to search. Oh, Nora, won't you go with me and help me? I would kneel to Jim, and implore him not to come forward against Rupert; I will be ever kind to Jim, and take care of his welfare, if he will only hear me! I will try to bring him on in life."

Nora, impulsive as was Mrs. Chattaway, but with far greater calmness of mind, strength of judgment, turned without a word. From that moment she entered into the plot heart and soul. If Jim Sanders could be kept back by mortal means, Nora would keep him. She revolved matters rapidly in her mind as she went along, but had not proceeded many steps when she halted, and laid her hand on the arm of her companion.

"I had better go alone about this business, Madam Chattaway. If you'll trust to me, it shall be done—if it can be done. You'll catch your death, coming out with nothing on, this cold night: and I'm not sure that it would answer for you to be seen in it."

"I must go on, Nora," was the earnest answer. "I cannot rest until I see what chance there is of finding Jim. As to catching cold, I have been standing in the open air since the fire broke out, and have not felt whether it was cold or hot. I am too feverish to-night for any cold to affect me."

Nevertheless, she untied her black silk apron as she spoke, and folded it over her head, concealing all her fair falling curls. Nora made no further remonstrance.

The most obvious place to look for Jim was evidently his own home; at least, it was the one that occurred to Nora. Jim had the honour of residing with his mother in a lonely three-cornered cottage, which could boast of two rooms and a loft in the roof. It was a good step to it, and they walked swiftly along, exchanging a sentence now and then, in hushed tones. As they came within view of it, Nora's quick sight detected the head (generally a very untidy one) of Mrs. Sanders, airing itself at the open door.

"You halt here, Madam Chattaway," she whispered, pointing to a friendly hedge, and let me go on and feel my way with *her*. She'll be a great deal more difficult to deal with than Jim; and the more I reflect, the more I am convinced that it will not do for you to be seen in it."

So far, Mrs. Chattaway acquiesced. She stopped under

cover of the hedge, and Nora went on alone. But when she had really gained the door, it was shut; no one was at it. She lifted the cumbrous, old-fashioned wooden latch, and entered. The door had no other fastening; strange as that fact may sound to the dwellers in towns. The woman had backed against the further wall, and was staring at the intruder with a face of dread. Keen Nora noted the signs, drew a very natural deduction from them, and shaped her tactics accordingly.

"Where's Jim?" began she, in a decisive but not unkind tone.

"It's not true what they are saying of him, Miss Dickson," gasped the woman. "I could be upon my Bible oath that he never did it. Jim ain't of that wicked natur; he'd not harm a fly."

"But there are such things as accidents, you know, Meg Sanders," promptly answered Nora, who had no doubt as to her cue now. "It's a certain thing that he was in the rick-yard with a lighted torch; and boys, as everybody knows, are the most careless animals on earth. Is Jim here? I suppose you have him in hiding?"

"I haven't set eyes on Jim since night fell," the woman answered.

"Look here, Meg Sanders, you had better avow the truth to me. I have come down as a friend, to see what can be done for Jim; and I can tell you this, that I would rather keep him in hiding—or put him in hiding, for the matter of that—than show him up to the police, and say, 'You'll find Jim Sanders so-and-so.' Tell me the whole truth, and I'll stand Jim's friend. Has he not been about our place from a little chap in petticoats, when he was put to hurrish the crows away from the land? It's not likely we should want to harm Jim."

Her words reassured the woman, but she persisted in her denial. "I declare to goodness, ma'am, that I know nothing of where he is," she said, pushing back her untidy hair, caps being articles of luxury that Mrs. Sanders's pocket did not allow her to indulge in. "He come in here after he left work, and tidied hisself a bit, and went off with one of them puppies of his; and he has never been back since."

"Yes," said Nora. "He took the puppy to the Hold, and was showing it to Bridget when the fire burst out—that's the tale that's told to me. But Jim had a torch, they say; and torches are dangerous things in rick-yards——"

"Jim's a fool!" was the complimentary interruption of Jim's

mother. "His head's running wild over that fine flighty gawky thing, Bridget—as ain't worth her salt. I asked him what he was bringing on that puppy for, and he said for Bridget—and I told him he was a simpleton for his pains. And now this has come of it!"

"How did you hear of Jim's being connected with the fire?"

"I have had a dozen past here, opening their mouths to tell me of it," resentfully spoke the woman. "Some of 'em said Mr. Rupert was mixed up in it, and that the police were after him as well as after Jim."

"It is true that Mr. Rupert is said to be mixed up in it," said Nora, speaking with a purpose. "And he is taken into custody."

"Into custody?" echoed Mrs. Sanders, in a scared whisper.

"Yes, he is; and Jim must be hidden away for the next four-and-twenty hours, or they'll take him. Where's he to be found?"

"I couldn't tell you if you killed me for't," protested Meg Sanders, in her fear; and her tones were an earnest of the truth. "Maybe he *is* in hiding—have gone and put hisself into 't in his fear of Chattaway and the p'lice. Though I'll take my oath he never did it wilful. If he *had* a torch, why, a spark of it might have blowed on to a loose bit of hay and fired it: but he never did it wilful. It ain't a windy night, either," she added reflectively. "Eh! the fool that that there Jim has been ever since he was born!"

Nora paused. In the uncertainty as to where to look for Jim, she did not see her way particularly clear to accomplish the object in view. She took a few moments' rapid counsel with herself.

"Listen, Meg Sanders, and pay attention to what I say to you," she cried impressively. "I can't do for Jim what I wanted to do, because he is not to be found. But now, mind: should he come in after I am gone, send him off instantly to me at the farm. Tell him to dodge in and out under the trees and hedges on his way, and to take care that nobody catches sight of him. When he gets to the farm, he must come to the front-door, and knock gently with his knuckles: I shall be in the room."

"And then?" questioned Mrs. Sanders, looking puzzled.

"I'll take care what then; I'll take care of *him*. Now, do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," said the woman. "I'll be sure to do it, Miss Dickson."

"Mind you do," said Nora. "And now, good night to you."

Mrs. Sanders was coming to the door with the candle, officiously to light her visitor over its threshold; but Nora peremptorily sent her back, giving her at the same time a piece of advice in rather a sharp tone—to keep her cottage dark and silent that night, lest the attention of passers-by might be drawn to it.

It was not cheering news to carry back to poor Mrs. Chattaway. That timid, trembling, unhappy lady had left the shelter of the hedge—where she probably found her crouching position not a very easy one—and was standing behind the huge trunk of a tree at a little distance, her arms clasping it for support, as she threw her whole weight upon it. To stand long, unaided, was almost a physical impossibility to her, for her spine was weak. She saw Nora, and came forward.

"Where is he?"

"He is not at home. His mother does not know where he is. She had heard that—— Hush! Who's this?"

Nora's voice dropped, and they retreated behind the tree. To be seen in the vicinity of Jim Sanders's cottage would not have been politic considering the object they had in view—that of burying the gentleman for a time. The steps advanced closer, and Nora, stealing a peep round the trunk, recognized Farmer Apperley.

He was coming from the direction of the Hold; and they rightly judged, seeing him walking pretty leisurely, that the danger must be over. At the same moment they became conscious of footsteps approaching from another direction. They were coming across the road, bearing rather towards the Hold, and in another moment would meet Mr. Apperley. Footsore, weary, but yet excited, and making what haste he could, their owner came in view, disclosing the face and person of Mr. Jim Sanders. Mrs. Chattaway uttered a suppressed exclamation, and would have started forward; but Nora, with more caution, held her back.

The farmer heard the cry, and looked round, but he could see nothing, and probably thought his ears had deceived him. As he turned his head again, there, right in front of him, was Jim Sanders. Quick as lightning his powerful grasp was laid upon the boy's shoulder.

"Now then! Where have you been skulking?"

"Lawk a mercy! I han't been skulking, sir," returned Jim, apparently surprised at the salutation. "I be a'most ready to drop with the speed I've made."

Poor, ill-judged Jim! In point of fact he had done more, indirectly, towards putting out the fire, than had Farmer Apperley and ten of the best men at his back. Jim's horror and consternation when he saw the flames burst forth had taken from him all thought—all power, as may be said—except instinct. Instinct led him to Barbrook, to apprise the fire-engine there: he saw it off, and then hastened all the way to Barmester, and actually gave notice to the engines and urged their departure before the arrival of Cris Chattaway on his fleet horse. From Barmester Jim started off to Layton's Heath—a place standing at an acute angle between Barmester and Barbrook, but further from both places than those two towns were apart from each other—and posted off the engines from there also. And now Jim was toiling back again, footsore and weary, but somewhat excited still, and was bending his course to Trevlyn Hold, to render his poor assistance towards putting out the flames. Rupert Trevlyn had always been a favourite of Jim's. Rupert in his good-natured way had petted Jim, and the boy in his unconscious gratitude was striving to amend the damage which he saw Rupert cause. In after-days, this night's walk—or rather *run* of Jim's, for he must have flown over the ground—was told of as a marvel verging on the impossible. Men are apt to forget the bodily marvels that may be done under the influence of any of the great emotions.

Something of this—of where he had been and for what purpose—Jim explained to the farmer, and Mr. Apperley released his hold upon him.

"They are saying up there, lad"—indicating the Hold—"that you had a torch in the rick-yard."

"So I had," replied Jim. "But I didn't do no damage with it."

"You told me that it was Rupert Trevlyn who had fired the rick."

"And so it was," replied Jim. "He was holding that there torch of mine, when Mr. Chattaway came up; a looking at the puppy, we was. And Chattaway he had a word or two with him, and then he horsewhipped him; and Mr. Rupert caught up the torch, which he had let fall, and pushed it into the rick. I see him," added Jim, conclusively.

Mr. Apperley stroked his chin. He also liked Rupert, and

he very much condemned the extreme chastisement inflicted by Mr. Chattaway. He did not go so far as to deem it an excuse, as Nora did—scarcely, perhaps, a palliation—for the mad act of Rupert; but it is certain he did not condemn it as he would have condemned it in another, or if committed under different circumstances. He felt grieved and uncomfortable; he was conscious of a sore feeling in his mind; and he heartily wished the whole night's work could be blotted out from the record of deeds done, and that Rupert was free again and guiltless.

"Well, lad, it's a bad job altogether," he observed; "but you don't seem to have been to blame except for taking a lighted torch into a rick-yard. Never you do such a thing again. You see what has come of it."

"We warn't anigh the ricks when I lighted the torch," pleaded Jim. "We was yards off 'em."

"That don't matter. There's always danger. I'd turn off the best man I have on my farm, if I saw him venture into the rick-yard with a torch. Don't you be such a fool again. Where are you off to now?" he added; for Jim, with a touch of his hat, was passing on.

"Up to the Hold, sir. I'm a-going help put out the fire."

"The fire's out—or nigh upon it; and you'd best stop where you are. If you show your face there, you'll get taken up by the police—they are looking out for you. And I don't see that you've done anything to merit a night's lodging in the lock-up," added the farmer, in his sense of justice. "Better pass it in your bed. You'll be wanted before the Bench to-morrow; but it's as good to go before them a free lad, as a prisoner. The prisoner they have already taken, Rupert Trevlyn, is enough. Never you take a torch anigh ricks again."

With this reiterated piece of advice, Mr. Apperley departed. Jim stood in indecision, revolving in a dazed kind of way the various pieces of information gratuitously bestowed upon him. He himself suspected; in danger of being took up by them perlice!—and Mr. Rupert a prisoner! and the fire out, or a'most out! It might be better, perhaps, that he went in to his cottage hard by, and got to sleep as Mr. Apperley advised, if he was not too over-tired to sleep.

But before Jim saw his way clearly out of the maze, or had come to any decision, he found himself seized from behind with a grasp fast and firm as had been Mr. Apperley's. A vision of

a file of policemen brought a rush of fear to Jim's mind, of hot blood to his face. But the arms proved to be only Nora Dickson's, and a soft, gentle voice of entreaty was whispering a prayer into his ear, almost as the prayer of an angel. Jim started in amazement, and looked round.

"Lawk a mercy!" ejaculated he. "Why, it's Madam Chattaway!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANOTHER VISITOR FOR MRS. SANDERS.

A FEW minutes after his encounter with Jim Sanders, to which interview Mrs. Chattaway and Nora had been unseen witnesses, Farmer Apperley met Policeman Dumps, to whom, if you remember, the superintendent had referred as having been despatched in search of Jim. He came up from the direction of Barbrook.

"I can't find him nowhere," was his salutation to Mr. Apperley. "I have been a'most all over the lands of Mr. Ryle, and in every hole and corner of Barbrook, and he ain't nowhere. I'm a-going on now to his own home, just for form's sake; but that's about the last place he'd hide in."

"Are you speaking of Rupert Trevlyn?" asked Mr. Apperley, who knew nothing of the man's having been sent in search of the other.

"No, sir, not him. That there Jim Sanders."

"Oh, you need not look after him," relied the farmer. "I have just met him. Jim's all right. It was not he who did the mischief. He has been after all the fire-engines on foot, and is just come back, dead-beat. He was going on to the Hold to help put out the fire, but I told him it was all but out, and that he could go home. There's not the least necessity to look after Jim."

Mr. Dumps—whose clear-sightedness was certainly not enough to set the Thames on fire, policeman though he was—received the news without any qualm of doubt. "I thought it a odd thing for Jim Sanders to do. He haven't got daring enough," he remarked. "That there kitchenmaid was right, I'll be bound, as to its being Mr. Rupert in his passion. Gone in home, did you say, sir?"

"In his bed by this time, I should say," replied the farmer. "They have got Mr. Rupert, Dumps."

"Have they?" returned Dumps, in a sort of admiration given to the success of his brother-officers. "But it's a nasty charge," he concluded, after a pause. "I shouldn't be sorry that he got off it."

The farmer continued his road towards Barbrook: the policeman went the other way. As he came to the cottage inhabited by the Sanders family, it occurred to him that he might as well ascertain the fact of Jim's safety, and he went to the door and knocked at its panels; a moderate knock, neither loud nor gentle. Mrs. Sanders opened it instantly, believing that it was the wanderer. When she saw policeman Dumps standing there, she thought she should have died with fright.

"Your son has just come in all right, I hear, Meg Sanders. Farmer Apperley have told me."

"Yes, sir," replied she, dropping a curtsey. The untruthful reply came from her in her terror, almost unconsciously; but there may have been some latent thought in her heart to *mislead* the policeman.

"Is he gone to bed? I don't want to disturb him if he is."

"Yes, sir," again replied she, trembling enough to give Mr. Dumps his suspicions, had he been of a suspicious nature, and the doorway not quite so dark.

"Well, they have got Mr. Rupert Trevlyn, so the examination will take place to-morrow morning. Your son had better go right over to Barmester the first thing after breakfast: tell him to make for the police-station, and stop there till he sees me. He'll have to give evidence, you know."

"Very well, sir," repeated the woman, in an agony of fear lest Jim should make his unfortunate appearance. "Jim ain't guilty, sir: he'd not harm a fly."

"No, he ain't guilty; but somebody else is, I suppose; and Jim must tell what he knows. You mind he sets off in time. Or—stop. Perhaps he had better come to the little station at Barbrook, and go over with us. Yes; that'll be best."

"To-night, sir?" asked she, timidly, not knowing what else to say.

"To-night?—no. What should we do with him to-night? He must be there at eight o'clock in the morning; or a little afore it. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

She watched him off, quite unable to understand the case,

for she had seen nothing of Jim, and Nora Dickson had not long gone. Mr. Dumps made his way to the head-quarters at Barbrook. They consisted of a moderately sized house, to get into which you had to dive down three steps; and when, later on, Bowen came in with his prisoner, Rupert Trevlyn, Dumps informed him that Jim Sanders was all right, and would be there by eight o'clock.

"Have you got him—all safe?"

"I haven't got him," replied Dumps. "There warn't no need for that. And he was abed and asleep," he added, improving upon his information. "It was him that went for all the injines, and he was dead tired."

"Your orders were to take him," curtly returned Bowen. He believed in the innocence of Jim as much as Dumps did, but he was not tolerant to the disobedience of orders. "He was seen with a lighted torch in the rick-yard, and that's enough."

Rupert Trevlyn looked round quickly. This conversation had occurred as Bowen was going through the room with his prisoner to consign the latter to a more secure one. "Jim Sanders did no harm with the torch, Bowen. He lighted it to show me a little puppy of his; nothing more. There is no need to accuse Jim. He——'

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Trevlyn, but I'd rather not hear anything from you one way or the other," interrupted Bowen. "Don't you as much as open your mouth about it, sir, unless you're obliged; and I speak in your interest when I give you this advice. Many a prisoner has brought home the guilt to himself through his own tongue, and which else never might have been brought home to him."

Rupert took the hint, and subsided into silence. He was consigned to his quarters for the night, and no doubt passed it as agreeably as was consistent with the circumstances.

The fire had not spread beyond a rick or two. It was quite out before midnight; and the engines, which had done effectual service, were on their way home again. At eight o'clock the following morning a fly was at the door to convey Rupert Trevlyn to Barmester. Mr. Bowen, a cautious man, deemed it well that the chief witness—it may be said, the only witness to any purpose—should be transported thither by the same conveyance. But that witness, Mr. Jim Sanders, delayed his appearance unwarrantably, and Dumps, in much wrath, started after him on the run. Back he came panting—

it was not more than a quarter-of-a-mile to the mother's cottage.

"He is gone on, the stupid blunderer," cried he to Bowen; "Mrs. Sanders says he's at Barmester by this time. He'll be at the station there, no doubt."

So the party started in state: Mr. Bowen, and Dumps, and Rupert Trevlyn inside; and he who had been sent to capture him, Mr. Chigwell, on the box. There was just as much necessity for the two men to go as there was for you or for me; but they would not have missed the day's excitement for the world: and Bowen did not interpose his veto.

The noise and bustle at the fire had been great, but it was scarcely greater than that which prevailed that morning at Barmester. Excitement had not often obtained so exclusive a place, and men and women of all grades and classes thronged the streets, eagerly asking for fresh details of the previous night's great event.

As a matter of course, various and most contradictory versions were afloat; it is invariably the case. All that was certainly known were the bare facts; Mr. Chattaway had horsewhipped Rupert Trevlyn; a fire had almost immediately burst out in the rick-yard; and Rupert was in custody on the charge of wilfully causing it.

Belief in Rupert's guilt was accorded a very limited degree. People could not forget the ill-feeling supposed to exist towards him in the breast of Mr. Chattaway; and the flying reports that it was Jim Sanders who had been the culprit, accidentally, if not wilfully, obtained far more credence than the other. The curious populace would have subscribed a good round sum to be allowed to question Jim to their hearts' content.

But a growing rumour, freezing the very marrow in the bones of their curiosity, had come abroad. It was said that Jim had disappeared; was not to be seen under the local skies; and it was this that caused the chief portion of the public excitement. For in point of fact, when Bowen and the rest arrived at Barmester, Jim Sanders could not be found or heard of. Dumps was despatched back to Barbrook in search of him.

The hearing was fixed for ten o'clock; and before that hour struck, the magistrates, a full bench of them—had taken their places. Many familiar faces were to be seen in the crowded court—I mean familiar to you, my readers; for the local world was alive with interest and curiosity. Rich and poor, friends

and foes, all had pressed in as long as there was a place unoccupied. In one part of the crowd might be seen the face of George Ryle, grave and subdued; in another, the dark flashing eyes of Nora Dickson; yonder were the red cheeks of Mr. Apperley; nearer, the pale and concerned countenance of the Reverend Mr. Freeman. Just before the commencement of the proceedings, the carriage from Trevlyn Hold drove up, and there descended from it Mr. and Madam Chattaway, and Miss Diana Trevlyn. A strange fashion, you will say, that they (the ladies) should appear; but it was not deemed strange in the locality. Miss Diana had asserted her determination to be present in a tone quite beyond the power of Mr. Chattaway to contradict, even had he wished to do so; and thus he had no plea for refusing his wife. How ill she looked! Scarcely a heart but ached for her. The two ladies sat in a retired spot, and Mr. Chattaway—who was in the commission of the peace, but did not exercise the privilege once in a dozen years—took his place on the bench.

Then the prisoner was brought in, civilly conducted by Superintendent Bowen. He had the handsome Trevlyn features, but tempered with the same delicacy which had characterized his father's—a delicacy he, Joe, had inherited from his mother, the Squire's lost wife; he, Rupert, had the bright blue eyes and the silky curls which distinguished Mrs. Chattaway. He looked pale, subdued, meek, gentlemanly—not in the least like one who would set fire to a hay-rick.

"Have you all your witnesses, Bowen?" inquired the presiding magistrate.

"All but one, sir, and I expect him here directly; I have sent to see after him," was the reply of Bowen. "In fact, I'm not sure but he *is* here," added the man, standing on tiptoe, and stretching his neck upwards; "the crowd's so great one can't see who's here and who isn't. If he can be heard first, his evidence may be conclusive, and save the trouble of examining the others."

"You can call him," observed the magistrate. "If he is here, he will answer. What's the name?"

"James Sanders, your worship."

"Call James Sanders," returned his worship, exalting his voice.

The call was made in obedience, and "James Sanders! James Sanders!" went ringing through the court, and the walls and roof echoed the cry.

But there was no other answer.

CHAPTER XL.

THE EXAMINATION.

THE morning sun—for the day was a bright one—shone upon the crowded court, as the Bench waited for the appearance of Mr. Jim Sanders. The windows, large and high, and guiltless of blinds, unless the accumulated dust on them could be called so, faced the south-east, and the warm autumn rays poured in, to the discomfort of any eyes on which they directly fell. They fell especially on the prisoner; on his fair hair, his winning countenance, his delicate face. They fell on the haughty features of Miss Diana Trevlyn, leaning forward to speak to Mr. Peterby, who had been summoned in haste to the court by herself, that he might watch the interests of Rupert. They fell on the sad face of Mrs. Chattaway, bent downwards until partly hidden under its falling curls; and they fell on the red face of Farmer Apperley, who was in a brown study, and gently flicking his top-boot with his riding-whip, as conveniently as the throng permitted him.

One, who had come pressing through the crowd, extended her hand, and touched the farmer on the shoulder. He turned to behold Nora Dickson.

"I say, Mr. Apperley, did your wife ever make those inquiries for me about that work-woman at the upholsterer's, whether she goes out by the day, or not?" asked Nora, as if speaking for the benefit of the court in general.

Mr. Apperley paused before he replied: he was collecting his thoughts upon the subject. "I *did* hear the missis say something about that woman," said he at length. "I can't call to mind what, though. Brown, isn't her name?"

"We must have her, or somebody else," continued Nora, in the same loud tones. "Our drawing-room winter curtains must be turned top for bottom; and as to the moreen bed-furniture——"

"Silence there!" interrupted an authoritative voice. And then there came again the same call which had already been echoed through the court twice before—

"James Sanders!"

"Just step here to the back, and I'll give your wife a message for the woman, if she'll be so good as deliver it," resumed Nora,

who persisted in her high tones, in defiance of the mandate just issued.

The farmer did not see why he need push his way through the throng to the back, or why the message could not have been given to him where he was; but we are all apt to yield to a ruling power, and he made his way after Nora.

She twisted herself through the crowded doorway of the court into a stone hall, which was comparatively empty. The farmer contrived to follow her; but he was short and stout, and he emerged purple with the exertion. Nora cast her cautious eyes around, and then bent towards him with the softest whisper.

"Look here, Mr. Apperley. If they examine *you*, you have no need to tell everything, you know."

Mr. Apperley, none of the keenest at taking a hint, stared at Nora. He could not understand. "What—are you talking about the upholstering woman?" asked he in his perplexity.

"Rubbish!" retorted Nora. "Do you suppose I brought you here to talk about her? You have not a bit of gumption—as everybody knows. Jim Sanders is not to be found; at least, it seems so," continued Nora, with a short cough; "for that's the third time they have called for him. Now, if they examine you—as I suppose they will, by Bowen saying you might be wanted, there's no need, you know, for you to go and repeat what Jim said when you met him last night down by his cottage, about Rupert Trevlyn's being guilty."

"Why! how did you know I met Jim there last night?" cried the farmer, staring at Nora.

"There's no time to explain now: I didn't dream it. You liked Joe Trevlyn: I have heard you say it."

"Ay, I did," replied the farmer, casting his thoughts back.

"Well, then, just bring to your mind how that poor lad, his son, has been wronged and put upon through life; think of the critical position he stands in now; there, right before a hundred eyes—brought to it through that usurper, Chattaway. Don't *you* help on the hue and cry against him, I say. You didn't *see* him fire the rick; you only heard Jim Sanders say that he fired it; and you are not called upon in any sort of justice to repeat that hearsay evidence. *Don't do it*, Mr. Apperley."

"I suppose I am not," assented he, doubtingly, after digesting the words.

"Indeed, you are not. If Jim can't be found, and you don't

speak, I think it's not much of a case they ll make out against him. After all, Jim *may* have done it himself, you know."

She turned away, leaving the farmer to follow her. "And if the woman can come, next week will do better for us than any other, please let Mrs. Apperley say," called she aloud, as she began to push her way back into court.

The farmer, slow at coming to conclusions, stopped where he was, pondering all sides of the question in his mind.

But there's a word to say about Policeman Dumps. Nothing could exceed the consternation experienced by that functionary at the non-appearance of Jim Sanders. On their arrival at Barmester, they had searched for him in vain. Dumps would not believe that he had been purposely deceived, although the stern eyes of his superior, Bowen, were bent on him with a very significant look. "Get the fleetest conveyance you can, and be off to Barbrook and see about it," were the whispered commands of the latter. "A pretty go, this is! I shall have the Bench blowing of me up in public!"

The Bench, vexed at the fruitless calls for Jim Sanders, looked much inclined to blow some one up. They were better off in regard to the sun than their audience, since they had their backs to it. The chairman, who sat in the middle, was a Mr. Pollard, a kindly, but hasty and opinionated man. He ordered the case to proceed, while the principal witness, Jim Sanders, was being looked for.

Mr. Flood, the lawyer from Barmester, acting for Mr. Chattaway, stated the case shortly and concisely. And the first witness called upon was Mr. Chattaway, who descended from the bench to give his evidence.

He was obliged to confess to his shame. He stood there before the condemning faces around, and acknowledged that the chastisement spoken to was a fact—that he *had* laid his horsewhip on the shoulders of Rupert Trevlyn. He was pressed for the why and wherefore—Chattaway was no favourite with his brother-magistrates, and they did not show him any remarkable favour—and he had further to confess that the provocation was totally inadequate to the punishment.

"State your grounds for charging your nephew, Rupert Trevlyn, with the crime," said the Bench.

"There is not the slightest doubt that he did it in a fit of passion," said Mr. Chattaway. "There was no one but him in the rick-yard, so far as I saw, and he had a lighted torch in his

hand. This torch he dropped for a moment, but I suppose he picked it up again."

"It is said that James Sanders was also in the rick-yard; that the torch was his."

"I cannot say. I did not see James Sanders. I saw only Rupert Trevlyn, and he had the torch in his hand when I went up. It was not many minutes after I quitted the rick-yard, leaving him in it, that I saw the flames break out."

Apparently this was all Mr. Chattaway knew of the actual facts. The man Hatch was called, and testified to the fact that Jim Sanders was in the rick-yard. Bridget, the kitchen-maid, in a state of much tremor, confirmed this, and confessed that she was there subsequently with Jim, that he had a torch, and that they saw the flames break out. She related her story pretty circumstantially, winding it up with the statement that Jim had told her it was Mr. Rupert who set it on fire.

"Stop a bit, lass," interrupted Mr. Peterby. "You have just stated to their worships that Jim Sanders flew off like one dazed with fright the minute he saw the flames burst forth, never stopping to speak a word. *Now* you say he told you it was Mr. Rupert who fired it. How do you reconcile the contradiction?"

"He had told me first, sir," answered the girl. "He said he saw the master horsewhip Mr. Rupert, and Mr. Rupert in his passion caught up the torch which had fell, and thrust it into the rick, and then leaped over the palings and got away. Jim, he pulled the torch out of the rick, and all the hay that had caught, as he thought; he told me all this when he was showing me the puppy. I suppose a spark must have stopped in to smoulder there, unknown to him."

"Now don't you think that you and he and the torch and the puppy, between you, managed to get the spark there, instead of its having 'smouldered,' eh, girl?" sarcastically asked Mr. Peterby.

Bridget burst into tears. "No, I am sure we did not," she answered.

"Don't you likewise think that this pretty little bit of news regarding Mr. Rupert may have been a fable of Mr. Jim's invention, to excuse his own carelessness or crime?" went on the lawyer.

"I am certain it was not, sir," she sobbed. "When Jim told me about Mr. Rupert, he never thought the rick was a fire."

They could not get on at all without Jim Sanders. Mr. Peterby's insinuations regarding Jim were pointed; nay, more than his insinuations, for he boldly asserted that the rick was far more likely to have been fired by Jim than Rupert—that is, by a spark from that careless gentleman's torch, while engaged with two objects so exacting as a puppy and Bridget. It appeared that Jim himself could alone clear up the knotty question, and the Court gave vent to its impatience, and wished they were at the heels of Policeman Dumps who had gone after him.

But the heels of Policeman Dumps could not by any manner of means have been flying more quickly over the ground, had the whole court been after him in full cry. In point of fact, they were not his own heels that were at work, but those of a fleet little horse, drawing the light gig in which the policeman sat. So effectually did he whip up this horse, that in considerably less time than half-an-hour, Mr. Dumps was nearing Jim's dwelling. As he passed the police-station at Barbrook, the only solitary policeman left to take care that day of the interests of the district was fulfilling his duty by taking a lounge against the door-post.

"Have you seen anything of that there Jim Sanders?" called out Mr. Dumps, partially checking his horse. "He has never made his appearance yonder, and I'm come after him."

"I hear he's off," answered the man.

"Off! Off where?"

"Cut away," was the explanatory reply. "He haven't been seen since last night."

Allowing himself a whole minute to take in the news, Mr. Dumps whipped on his horse, and gave utterance to a very unparliamentary word. When he burst into Mrs. Sanders's cottage, which was full of steam, and she before a washing-tub, he seized that lady's arm in so emphatic a manner that she, perceiving what was coming, gave a short scream, and plunged her face and head into the soap-suds.

Mr. Dumps ungallantly shook her clear of them. "Now then, you just answer me," cried he; "and if you speak a word of a lie this time maybe you'll get transported, or summat as bad. What made you tell me last night that Jim had come home and was in bed? Where is he?"

She supposed he knew all—all the wickedness of her conduct in screening him; and it had the effect of hardening her. She

was driven, as it were, to bay; and deceit was no longer available either for her or for Jim.

"If you did transport me I couldn't tell where he is. I don't know. I never set eyes on him all the blessed night, and that's the naked truth. Let me go, Mr. Dumps: it's no good choking of me."

Mr. Dumps looked ready to choke, himself. He had been deceived, and turned aside from the execution of his duty—he, Policeman Dumps; and the other police would have the laugh at him, and Bowen would blow up, and the Bench at Barmester was waiting, and Jim was off—and that there wretched woman had done it all! Mr. Dumps ground his teeth in his impotent rage.

"I'll have you punished as sure as my name's what it is, Meg Sanders, if you don't tell me the truth about Jim," he foamed. "Is he in this here house?"

"You be welcome to search the house," she replied, flinging open the staircase door, which led to the loft. "I'm not a-telling nothing but truth now, though I was frighted into doing of summat else last night. You says, says you, 'Your son have just come in all right, I hear, Mrs. Sanders, Farmer Apperley have told me;' and the words put me up to say as he *had* come in. I was frighted to death a'most, sir, and so I was this morning when I said he'd gone on to Barmester."

Mr. Dumps felt inclined to shake her: we are sure to be more angry with others when we have ourselves to blame; how could he have been fool enough to place such blind confidence in Farmer Apperley? One thing forced itself on his conviction; the woman was speaking nothing but truth now.

"You persist in it to my face that you don't know where Jim is?" he cried.

"I swear I don't. There! I swear I have never set eyes on him since last night when he came home after work, and went out to take his black puppy up to Trevlyn Hold. He never come in after that."

"You just dry that soap-suddy head of yourn, and put your bonnet on it, and come straight off, and tell that to the magistrates," commanded Mr. Dumps, in sullen tones.

She did not dare resist. She put on the bonnet, and flung her old shawl across her shoulders, and was marshalled by Mr. Dumps to the gig. To look after Jim was a secondary consideration. To make his own excuse good was the first; and if

Jim had had a matter of twelve-hours' start, he might be at twelve-hours' distance.

Not to be found! Jim Sanders had made his escape, and was not to be found! reiterated the indignant Bench, when Mrs. Sanders and her escort appeared. What did Bowen mean, they asked, by asserting to them that Jim was ready to be called upon?

Bowen shifted the blame from his own shoulders to those of Dumps; and Dumps, with a red face, shifted it on to Mrs. Sanders. She was sternly questioned, and made the same excuse that she had made to Dumps—it was through his saying to her, evidently assuming it, that Jim had returned, and was in bed, which caused her in her fright to agree with it, and reply that he was. She was frighted a'most out of her senses, she added; but she'd take her oath to the truth now—that she had not seen Jim, and that he had never been anigh home since he went out of it with the puppy in the earlier part of the evening, and that she knew no more where Jim was than Mr. Dumps himself did.

That she told the truth appeared to be pretty clear to the magistrates, and to punish her for having so far used deceit to screen her son, might have been neither just nor legal. They turned back on Dumps.

"What induced you to put such a leading question to the woman, assuming that the boy was at home and in bed?" was their severe question.

Dumps turned his hat round in his hand in a very sheep-faced manner, and began rather to excuse himself than to explain. Such a thing hadn't never happened to him afore as to be blinded; and it were Mr. Apperley's fault, for he met that gentleman nigh Meg Sanders's door, and he told him Jim was all right, and was gone in home to bed.

This was the first time Mr. Apperley's name had been mentioned in connection with the affair, and the magistrates ordered him before them. Nora insinuated her way to the front, and stood looking at him as he gave his evidence; whilst Mrs. Chattaway's face bent lower, to conceal its anxious expression, the wild beating of her heart.

"Did you meet James Sanders last night, Mr. Apperley?" inquired the chairman. "As Policeman Dumps asserts?"

"Yes; I did, sir. I was going home, when the danger was over, and the fire had got low, and I came upon Jim Sanders near his cottage, coming from the direction of Layton's Heath.

Knowing he had been looked after, I laid hold of him: but the boy told me, all simple like, where he had been, which was after the different engines—to Barbrook, to Barmester, and to Layton's Heath—and he was then hastening to the Hold to help at the fire. I told him the fire was close upon out, and that he might go in and get to bed."

"And you told Dumps that he had gone in to bed?"

"I did. I never supposed but that Jim went straight in, then and there; and when I met Dumps a few minutes afterwards, I told him he had so gone. I can't make it out—I can't understand it at all. The boy seemed almost too tired to move, and no wonder—and why he did not go in, or where he could have gone instead, is uncommon odd to me. It's to know whether his mother speaks truth in saying he did not go in," added the farmer, gratuitously imparting a little of his mind to the Bench.

"What did he say to you?"

"He said where he had been, and he said he was going up to the Hold," replied the witness, in tones of palpable hesitation, as if he were weighing his words before speaking them.

"You are sure it was Jim Sanders?" asked a very silent magistrate who sat at the end of the bench.

Mr. Apperley opened his eyes at this. "Sure it was Jim Sanders? Yes; I'm sure of that, sir. I know him well enough."

"Well, it appears that only you, so far as can be learnt, saw Jim Sanders at all near the spot after the alarm went out."

"Like enough," answered the farmer. "If the boy went to all these places, one after the other, he couldn't be nigh the Hold. He must have come on at a fine speed, to be back as soon as he was. But there's no mistake about my having seen him, and talked to him; and I am sure I as much thought he went right into his home as I think I am standing here this minute, else I never should have asserted it to Dumps."

The danger appeared to be over. The Bench seemed to have no intention of asking further questions of Mr. Apperley, and Nora breathed freely again. But it often happens that when we deem ourselves most secure, hidden danger is all the nearer. As the witness was turning round to retire, Flood, the lawyer, stepped forward.

"A moment yet, if you please, Mr. Apperley. I must ask you a question or two, with the permission of the Bench. I

believe you had met Jim Sanders before that, last night—soon after the breaking out of the fire?"

"Yes," replied the farmer; "it was at the bend of the road between the Hold and Barbrook. I had that minute caught sight of the flame, not knowing rightly where it was or what it was, and Jim came running up and said, as well as he could speak for his hurry and agitation, that it was in Mr. Chattaway's rick-yard."

"Agitated, was he?" asked the Bench; and a keen observer might have noticed Mr. Flood's brow contract with a momentary annoyance.

"He was so agitated as to be almost unaware of what he was saying, as it appeared to me," returned the witness. "He went away at great speed in the direction of Barbrook; on his way—as I learnt afterwards—to fetch the fire-engines."

"And very laudable of him to do so," spoke up the lawyer. "But I have a serious question to put to you now, Mr. Apperley; be so good as to attend to me, and speak up. Did not Jim Sanders distinctly tell you that it was Rupert Trevlyn who had fired the rick?"

Mr. Apperley paused in indecision. On the one hand, he was a plain, straightforward, honest man, possessing little tact, no cunning; on the other, he shrank from doing harm to Rupert. Nora's words had left a strong impression upon him, and the mysterious absence of Jim Sanders was also producing its effect, as it was on three-parts of the people in court. He and they were beginning to ask why Jim should run away unless he had been guilty.

"Have you lost your tongue, Mr. Apperley?" resumed the lawyer. "Did or did not Jim Sanders say that it was Rupert Trevlyn who fired the rick?"

"I cannot say but he did," replied Mr. Apperley, as an unpleasant remembrance came across him of having proclaimed this fact himself the previous night at Trevlyn Hold to as many as chose to listen, to which incaution (as he began to think it now) Mr. Flood no doubt owed his knowledge. "But Jim appeared so flustered and wild," he continued, "that my belief is—and I have said this before—that he didn't rightly know what he was saying."

"Unless I am misinformed, you had just before met Rupert Trevlyn," continued Mr. Flood. "*He* was wild and flustered, was he not?"

"He was. Worse than Jim of the two."

"Were both coming from the same direction?"

"Yes. As if they had run straight from the Hold."

"From the rick-yard, eh?"

"It might be that they had; 'twas pretty straight from there, if they leaped a hedge or two."

"Just so. You were walking soberly along the high-road, on your way to Bluck the farrier's, when you were startled by the apparition of Rupert Trevlyn flying from the direction of the rick-yard like a wild animal—I only quote your own account of the fact, Mr. Apperley; your own words. Rupert was pale and breathless; in short, as you described him, he must have been under the influence of some great terror, or"—and the lawyer's words grew ominously slow and distinct—"*of guilt.* Was this so? Tell their worships."

"It was so," replied Mr. Apperley.

"You tried to stop him, and you could not; and as you stood looking after him, wondering whether he was mad, and, if not mad, what could have put him into such a state, Jim Sanders came up and told you a piece of news that was sufficient to account for any amount of agitation—namely, that Rupert Trevlyn had just set fire to one of the ricks in the yard at the Hold."

It was utterly impossible that Mr. Apperley in his truth could deny this, and a faint cry broke from the lips of Mrs. Chattaway. But when Mr. Flood had done with the farmer, it was Mr. Peterby's turn to question him. He had not much to ask him, but he elicited from him the positive avowal—and the farmer seemed to be willing to make as much of it as did Mr. Peterby—that Jim Sanders was in as great a state of agitation as Rupert Trevlyn, or nearly as great. He, Mr. Apperley, summed up the fact by certain effective words.

"Yes, they were both agitated—both wild; and if those signs were any proof of the crime, the one looked as likely to have committed it as the other."

The words told with the Bench. Mr. Flood exerted his eloquence to prove that Rupert Trevlyn, and he alone, must have been guilty. Not that he had any personal ill-feeling to Rupert; he only spoke in his lawyerly instinct, which must do all it could for his client's cause. Mr. Peterby, on the other hand, argued that the detailed circumstances were more conclusive of the guilt of James Sanders. Mr. Apperley had testified that both were nearly equally agitated; and if Rupert was the most so, it was only natural, for a gentleman's feelings were more

easily stirred than an ignorant day-labourer's. In point of fact, this agitation might have proceeded from terror alone in each of them. Looking at the case dispassionately, what real point was there against Rupert Trevlyn? None. Who dared to assert that he was guilty? No one but the runaway, James Sanders, who most probably proffered the charge to screen himself. Where was James Sanders, Mr. Peterby continued, looking round the court? Nowhere: he had decamped; and this, of itself, ought to be taken by all sensible people as the most conclusive proof of guilt. He asked the Bench, in their justice, not to remand Rupert Trevlyn, as was urged by Mr. Flood, but to discharge him, and issue a warrant for the apprehension of James Sanders.

Ah, what anxious hearts were some of those in court as the magistrates consulted with each other. Mr. Chattaway had had the grace not to return to his seat, and he waited, as did the rest of the audience. Presently the chairman spoke—and it is very possible that the general disfavour in which Mr. Chattaway was held had insensibly influenced their decision.

It appeared to the Bench, he said, that there was not sufficient facts proved against Rupert Trevlyn to justify their keeping him in custody, or in remanding the case. That he may have smarted in passion under the personal chastisement inflicted by Mr. Chattaway was not unlikely, and that gentleman had proved that, when he left the rick-yard, the lighted torch was, so to say, in possession of the prisoner. Mr. Apperley had likewise testified to meeting Rupert Trevlyn soon afterwards in a state of wild agitation. In the opinion of the Bench, these facts were not worth much: the lighted torch, as was proved, was in the possession of James Sanders in the rick-yard after this, as it had been before it; and the prisoner's agitation might have been solely the effect of the beating inflicted on him by Mr. Chattaway. Except the assertion of the boy, James Sanders, as spoken to by Mr. Apperley and the servant-maid, Bridget Sanders, there was nothing to connect the prisoner with the actual crime. It had been argued by Mr. Peterby that James Sanders himself had probably committed it, wilfully or accidentally, and that his absence might be regarded as a pretty conclusive proof of this. Be that as it might, the Bench had come to the decision that there were not sufficient grounds for detaining the prisoner, and therefore he was discharged.

He was discharged! And the shout of approbation that arose in court made the very walls ring.

CHAPTER XLI.

A NIGHT ENCOUNTER.

THE first to press up to Rupert Trevlyn after his restored liberty, was George Ryle. George held a very decided opinion upon the unhappy case; but he strove to bury it five-fathom deep in his heart, and he hated Mr. Chattaway for the inflicted horse-whipping. Holding his arm out to Rupert, he led him towards the exit; but the sea of faces, of friendly voices, of shaking hands, was great, and somehow he and Rupert were separated.

"It is a new lease of life for me, George," whispered a soft, sweet voice in his ear, and he turned to behold the glowing cheeks of Mrs. Chattaway. Glowing with thanksgiving and only unqualified happiness.

Unqualified? Ah, if she could only have looked into the future, as George did in his forethought! Jim Sanders would probably not remain absent for ever. But he suffered his face to become radiant as Mrs. Chattaway's, as he stayed to talk with her.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Chattaway was it not a shout? I will drive Rupert home. I have my gig here. Treve shall walk. I wonder—I have been wondering whether it would not be better for all parties if Rupert came and stayed a week with Treve at the Farm? It might give time for the unpleasantness to blow over between him and Mr. Chattaway."

"How good you are, George! If it only might be! I'll speak to Diana."

She turned to Miss Diana Trevlyn and George saw Rupert talking with Mr. Peterby. At that moment, some one took possession of George.

It was Mr. Wall, the linendraper. He had been in court all the time, his sympathies entirely with the prisoner, in spite of his early friendship with the master of Trevlyn Hold. Ever since that one month passed at Mr. Wall's house, which George at the time thought the blackest month that could have fallen to the lot of mortal, Mr. Wall and George had been great friends.

"This has been a nasty business, George," he said in an undertone. "Where *is* Jim Sanders?"

George disclaimed, and with truth, all knowledge on the point. Mr. Wall resumed.

"I guess how it was; an outbreak of the Trevlyn temper. Chattaway was a fool to provoke it. Cruel, too. He had no more right to take a whip to Rupert Trevlyn than I have to take one to my head-shopman. Were the ricks insured?"

"No. There's the smart with Chattaway. He never would insure his ricks; never has insured them. It is said—I don't know with what truth—that Miss Diana has often told him he deserved to have his ricks burnt down for being penny wise and pound foolish."

"How many were burnt?"

"Two: and another damaged with the water. It is a smart loss."

"Ay. One he won't relish. Rupert is not *secure*, you know," continued Mr. Wall in a spirit of friendly warning. "He can be taken up again."

"I am aware of that. And this time I think it will be very difficult to lay the spirit of anger in Mr. Chattaway. Good evening. I am going to drive Rupert home. Where has he got to?"

George had cause to reiterate the words "Where has he got to?" for he could not see him anywhere. His eyes roved in vain in search of Rupert. Mr. Peterby, as he could see, was alone now.

George went hunting for him everywhere. He inquired of every one, friend and stranger, if they had seen Rupert, but all in vain; he could not meet him or hear of him. At last he gave up the search, and started for home, Treve occupying the place in the gig which he had offered to Rupert.

Where was Rupert? Rupert, in a state of mind not to be described, had stolen away in the dusky night from the mass of faces, the minute he was released by Mr. Peterby, and made the best of his way out of Barmester, taking the field way towards the Hold. He felt in a sea of guilt and shame. To stand there a prisoner, the consciousness of guilt upon him—for he knew that he did fire the rick—was as the very keenest agony. When his previous night's passion cooled down, it was replaced by an awful sense—and the word "awful" is not misplaced—of the enormity of his act. It was a positive fact that he could not remember the details of that evil moment; but an innate conviction was upon him that he did thrust the burning brand into the rick and had so revenged

himself on Mr. Chattaway. He turned aghast as he thought of it: in his sober senses he would be one of the last to commit so great a wickedness—would shudder at its bare thought. Not only was the weight of the guilt upon his mind, but a dread of the consequences. Rupert was no hero, and the horror of the *punishment* that might follow was working havoc in his brain. If he had escaped it for this day, he knew enough of our laws to be aware that he might not escape it another, and that Chattaway would prove implacable. The disgrace of a trial, the brand of felon—all might be his. Perhaps it was fear as much as shame which took Rupert alone out of Barmester.

He knew not where to go. He reached the neighbourhood of the Hold, passed it, and wandered about in the moonlight, sick with hunger, weary with walking. He began to wish he had gone home with George Ryle; and he wished he could see George Ryle then, and ask his advice. To the Hold, to face Chattaway, he dared not yet go; nay, with that consciousness of guilt upon him, he shrank from facing his kind aunt Edith, his sister Maude, his aunt Diana. A sudden thought flashed into his mind—and for the moment it seemed like an inspiration—he would go after Mr. Daw and beg a shelter with him.

But to get to Mr. Daw, who lived in some unknown region in the Pyrenees, and had no doubt, crossed the Channel on his journey, would take money, time, and strength. As the practical views of the idea came up before him one by one, he abandoned it in utter despair. Where should he go and what should he do? He sat down on the stile forming the entrance to a small grove of trees, through which a near road led to Barbrook; in fact, it was at the end of that very field where Mr. Apperley had seen him the previous evening careering like a wild animal. Some subtle instinct, perhaps, took his wandering steps to it. As he leaned against the stile, he became conscious of the advance of some one along the narrow path leading from Barbrook—a woman, by her petticoats.

It was a lovely night, the moon very bright. The previous night had been dull, but on this one the moon shone in all her splendour. Rupert did not fear a woman, least of all the one approaching, for he saw that it was Ann Canham. She had been at work at the parsonage. Mrs. Freeman, taking advantage of the departure of their guest, had instituted the autumn half-yearly cleaning, delayed on his account; and Ann had been there to-day, helping Molly, and was to go also on

the morrow. A few happy tears dropped from her eyes when she saw him.

"The parson's already home with the good news, sir. But why ever do you sit here, Master Rupert?"

"Because I have nowhere to go to," returned Rupert.

Ann paused, and then spoke timidly. "Isn't there the Hold, as usual, sir?"

"I can't go there. Chattaway might horsewhip me again, you know, Ann."

The bitter mockery with which he spoke brought pain to her. "Where shall you go, sir?"

"I don't know. Lie down under these trees till morning. I am awfully hungry."

Ann Canham opened a basket which she carried, and took out a small loaf, or cake. She offered it to Rupert, curtseying humbly.

"Molly has been baking to-day, sir; and the missis, she gave me this little loaf for my father. Please to accept of it, sir."

Rupert's impulse was to refuse, but hunger was strong within him. He took a knife from his pocket, cut it in two, and gave one half back to Ann Canham.

"Tell Mark I had the other, Ann. He won't grudge it to me. And now you go on home. It's of no use your stopping here."

She made as if she would depart, but hesitated. "Master Rupert, I don't like to leave you here, so friendless. Won't you come to the lodge, sir, and shelter there for the night?"

"No, that I won't," he answered. "Thank you, Ann; but I am not going to get you and Mark into trouble as I have got myself."

She sighed as she finally went away. When would this unhappy trouble, touching Rupert, be over? Ever?

Perhaps Rupert was asking the same. He ate the bread, and sat on the stile afterwards, ruminating. He was terribly bitter against Chattaway; he felt that but for his wicked conduct he should not now be the outcast he was. All the wrongs of his life rose up before him. The Hold that ought to be his, the rank he was deprived of, the wretched humiliations that were his daily portion. They assumed quite an exaggerated importance to his mind. He worked himself into —not the passion of the previous night, but into an angry, defiant temper; and he wished he could meet Chattaway face to face, and return the blows the pain of which was still upon him.

With a cry that almost burst from his lips in terror, with a feeling verging on the supernatural, he suddenly saw Chattaway before him. Rupert recovered himself, and though his heart beat pretty fast, he kept his seat on the stile in his defiant humour.

And Mr. Chattaway? Every drop of blood in that gentleman's body had bubbled up with the unjust leniency shown by the magistrates, and had remained since at boiling heat. Never, never had his feelings been so excited against Rupert as they were on this night. As he came along he was plotting with himself how Rupert could be recaptured on the morrow —on what pretext he could apply for a warrant against him. That miserable, detested Rupert! He made his life a terror through that latent dread, he was a burden on his pocket, he brought him into disfavour with the neighbourhood, he treated him with cavalier insolence, and now he had set his ricks on fire. And—there he was! There! Before him in the moonlight. Mr. Chattaway bounded forward, and seized him by the shoulder.

A struggle ensued. Blows were given on either side. But Mr. Chattaway was the strongest: he flung Rupert to the ground; and a dull, heavy sound went forth on the still night air.

Did the sound come from Rupert, or from Mr. Chattaway? No; Rupert was lying motionless, and Mr. Chattaway knew that he had made no noise himself. He looked up in the trees, but it had not been shrill enough for a night-bird. A rustling caught his ear behind the narrow grove, and Mr. Chattaway bounded towards it. He was just in time to see a man's legs emerging from it, and flying over the ground in the direction of Barbrook.

Who had been a witness to the scene?

CHAPTER XLII.

NEWS FOR TREVLYN HOLD.

When Mr. and Mrs. Chattaway and Miss Diana had driven home from Barmester, they were met with curious faces and eager questions, for the result of the day's proceedings had not yet reached the Hold. It added to the terrible mortification

already gnawing the heart of Mr. Chattaway to have to confess that Rupert was discharged. He had been too outspoken that morning before his children and household, of the certain punishment in store for Rupert—his committal for trial.

And the mortification was destined to be increased on another score. Whilst they were seated at refreshment—a sort of dinner-tea—Cris came in from Blackstone with some news. The Government inspectors had been there that day, and had chosen to put themselves out on account of the absence of Mr. Chattaway, whom they had reason to expect would be at the office.

"They mean mischief, I am sure," observed Cris. "How far *can* they interfere?" he asked, turning to his father. "Can they force you to go to the expense they hint at?"

Mr. Chattaway really did not know. He sat looking surly and gloomy, buried in rumination, and by-and-by he rose and left the room. Soon after this, George Ryle entered. He was come to fetch Rupert to the farm. George knew now that Rupert had walked home: Bluck, the farrier, had told him so. But Rupert, it appeared, was not yet come in.

So George waited: waited and waited. It was a most uncomfortable evening. Mrs. Chattaway was palpably nervous and anxious, and Maude, who sat apart, as if conscious that Rupert's fault in some degree reflected upon her, his sister, was as white as a sheet. It was nearly eleven when George rose to leave. Rupert, it must be supposed, had taken shelter somewhere for the night, and Mr. Chattaway did not appear in a hurry to enter. None of them had any idea where Mr. Chattaway was gone to: when he left the room, they had only supposed him to be going to the outbuildings.

The whole flood of moonlight came flushing on George Ryle, as he stood for a moment at the door of Trevlyn Hold. He lifted his face to it, thinking how beautiful it was, when the door was softly opened behind him, and Maude came out, pale and shivering.

"Forgive my following you, George," she whispered, in pleading, deprecating tones. "I could not ask you before them, but I am ill with suspense. Tell me, is the danger over for Rupert?"

George took her hand in his. He looked down with grave pity, with tender fondness, upon the unhappy girl; but he hesitated in his answer.

She bent her head down on George's hand, as it held both hers, and there came up to him a half-breathed whisper of pain. "Do you believe he did it?"

"Maude, my darling, I do believe he did it; you ask me for the truth, and I will not give you anything else. But I believe that he must have been in a state of madness, not responsible for his actions."

"What can be done?" she gasped.

"Nothing. Nothing, except that we must endeavour to conciliate Mr. Chattaway. If he can be appeased, the danger will pass away."

"He never will be appeased!" she answered in her distress. "He will think of the value of the ricks, and the money lost to him. George, if it comes to the worst—if they try Rupert, I shall die."

"Hush, my dear, hush? Try and look on the bright side of things, Maude; your grieving now cannot benefit Rupert, and will harm you. Nothing shall be left undone on my part to serve Rupert. I wish I had more influence with Mr. Chattaway."

"No one has any influence with him,—no one in the world; unless it is Aunt Diana."

"She has—and I can talk to her as I could not to Chattaway. I intend to see her privately in the morning. My child, how you shiver!"

"I can't help it," pleaded Maude, helplessly.

George bent to take his farewell, and then went on his way. Ere he was quite out of sight, he turned to take a last look at her. She was standing in the white moonlight, her hands clasped; her face one sad expression of distress, fear, and despair. A vague feeling of superstition came over George that this despondency of Maude's bore ill omen for poor Rupert. But he could not have told why the idea should have come to him, and he put it from him as absurd and foolish.

The night wore on at the Hold, and its master did not return. All sat up, ladies, children, and servants; all wondered where he could be. It was hard upon midnight when his ring sounded at the door.

Mr. Chattaway came in with his face scratched and a bruise over one eye. The servant stared at him in astonishment, and he noticed, as his master unbuttoned a light overcoat he wore, that the front of his shirt was torn. Mr. Chattaway was

not a master to be questioned by his servants, and the man went off to the kitchen and imparted the news.

"Good Heavens, papa! what have you done to your face?"

The exclamation came from Octave, who was the first to catch sight of him as he entered the room. Mr. Chattaway responded by an angry demand why they were not in bed, what they did sitting up at that hour: and he began to light the bed-candles.

"What *have* you done to your face?" reiterated Miss Diana, coming close to him to take a nearer view.

"Nothing," was his curt response.

"What's the use of saying that?" retorted Miss Diana. "Something is the matter with it. It looks as though you had been fighting. And your shirt's torn!"

"I tell you there's nothing the matter with it; or with my shirt either," he said testily. "Can't you take an answer?" And, as if to put an end to the questioning, he took a candle and went up to his chamber.

The scratches were less apparent in the morning, and the bruise was only a slight one. Cris, in his indifferent manner, said the Squire must have walked up against the branches of some thorny tree.

By tacit consent, as it were, they avoided all mention of Rupert. It is possible that even Miss Diana did not care to mention his name to Mr. Chattaway. Whilst they were at breakfast, Hatch came and put his head inside the door.

"Jim Sanders is back, sir."

Mr. Chattaway started up, a certain flashing light in his dull eyes that boded no good to Jim. "Where is he?" he cried. "How do you know?"

"Ted, the cow-boy, have just seen him at work at Mr. Ryle's as usual, sir. I thought you might like to know it, and I made bold to come in and tell ye. Ted asked him where he had runned away to yesterday, and Jim answered as he had not runned at all; he had only overslep' hisself."

Mr. Chattaway hastened from the room, followed by Cris; and Mrs. Chattaway took the opportunity to ask Hatch if he had seen or heard anything of Mr. Rupert. But Hatch only stood stolidly in the middle of the carpet, and made no reply.

"Did you not hear Madam's question, Hatch?" sharply asked Miss Diana. "Why don't you answer it?"

"'Cause I don't like to," responded stolid Hatch. "Happen Madam mayn't like to hear the answer to't, Miss Diana."

"Nonsense!" quickly cried Miss Trevlyn. "Have you heard of him?"

"Well, yes, I have," answered Hatch. "They be a-talking of it now in the sheep-pen."

"What are they saying?" asked Mrs. Chattaway, her eager tone betraying a latent dread.

But the man never answered. He turned his straw hat round on his hand, and stared at his mistress.

"What are they saying?—do you hear, Hatch?" imperatively repeated Miss Diana.

Hatch could not hold out longer. "They be a-saying that he's dead, ma'am."

"That he is—*what?*"

"They be saying that Mr. Rupert's dead," equably repeated Hatch; "that he was killed down in the little grove last night, as you go through the fields to Barbrook. I didn't like to tell the Squire on't, 'cause they be saying that if he be killed, happen it be the Squire that have killed him."

Only for a moment did Miss Diana Trevlyn lose her self-possession. She raised her hands to still the awestruck terror around her; she glanced at Mrs. Chattaway's blanched face. "Hatch, where did you hear this?"

"In the sheep-pen, Miss Diana," repeated the man. "The men there be a-talking on't. They say he was killed last night—murdered."

Her own face for once in her life was turning white. "Be still, all of you, and remain here," she said. "Edith, if ever you had need of self-command, it is now."

She went straight off to the sheep-pen, calling Hatch with her. From the first moment that Hatch had spoken, there had risen up before her, as an ugly picture—as a dream to be shunned—the scratched and bruised face of Mr. Chattaway.

The sheep-pen was empty: the men had dispersed. Cris came out of the stables, and she made a sign to him. He advanced to meet her. "Where is your father?" she asked.

"Off to Barbrook," returned Cris. "Sam wasn't long getting his horse ready, was he? He is gone to order Bowen to look after Mr. Jim Sanders."

"Cris, have you heard this report about Rupert?" she resumed, her hushed tones imparting to Cris's ear a vague sense of something unpleasant.

"I have not heard any report about him," returned Cris. "What is the report? That's he's dead?"

"Yes, Cris; that he is dead."

Cris had spoken in a half-jesting, half-sneering tone; but his face changed at the answer, consternation in its every feature. "What on earth do you mean, Aunt Diana? Rupert——"

"Good morning, Miss Diana."

They turned to behold George Ryle. He had come up thus early to know if they had news of Rupert. The scared expression of their faces struck him that something was amiss.

"You have bad news, I see. What is it?"

Miss Diana rapidly turned over a question in her mind. Should she mention this report to George? Yes; he was thoroughly trustworthy; and he might be of use.

"Hatch came in a few minutes ago, and he frightened us very greatly," she said. "I was just telling Cris of it. The man says there's a report going about that Rupert is—is"—she scarcely liked to bring it out in all its nakedness—"is dead."

"What?" uttered George.

"That he has been killed," continued Miss Diana. "George, I want to get at the truth of it."

He could not rejoin just at first. News, such as that, takes time in revolving. He could only look at them alternately; his heart, for Rupert's sake, beating fast. Miss Diana repeated what Hatch had said. "George," she concluded, "I cannot go looking after these men, examining into the truth or falsehood of the report, but you might."

George started away impulsively ere she had well done speaking. Hatch mentioned the names of the men who had been talking, and George hastened to look for them over the fields. Cris was following him, but Miss Diana caught him by the arm."

"Not you, Cris; stop where you are."

"Stop where I am?" returned Cris, indignantly, who had a very great objection to be interfered with by Miss Diana. "I shall not, indeed. I don't pretend to have had much love for Rupert, but I'm sure I shall look after it if there's such a report as that about. He must have killed himself, if he is dead."

But Miss Diana kept her hand upon him. "Cris, remain where you are, I say. They are connecting your father's name with it in a manner I do not understand, and it will be better that you should be still until we know more."

She went on to the house as she spoke. Cris stared after her in blank dismay, wondering what could be the meaning of

the words she had spoken, yet sufficiently discomposed by them to give up for once his own will, and remain quiet, as she had said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Chattaway, unconscious of the commotion at the Hold, was galloping towards Barbrook. He reined in at the police-station, and Bowen came out to him.

"I know what you have come about, Mr. Chattaway," cried out the man, before that gentleman could speak. "It's to tell us that Jim Sanders has turned up. We know all about it, and Dumps is gone after him. Hang the boy! giving us all this bother."

"I'll have him punished, Bowen."

"Well, sir, it's to know whether he won't get enough punishment as it is. His going off looks uncommonly suspicious—as I said yesterday. It looks as if he had had a finger in the pie."

"Is Dumps going to bring him on here?"

"Right away, as fast as he can march him. Impudent monkey, going to his work at his master's this morning, just as if nothing had happened! Dumps 'll be on to him. They won't be long, sir."

"Then I'll wait," decided Mr. Chattaway.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE REVELATION OF MR. JAMES SANDERS.

George Ryle speedily found the men spoken of by Hatch as having held the conversation in the sheep-pen. But he could gather no more certainty from them than Miss Diana had gathered from Hatch. Upon endeavouring to trace the report to its source—or, rather, to whence they heard it—he succeeded in finding out that one man alone had brought it to the Hold; that it was he who had told the rest. This man declared he heard it from his wife, and that his wife had heard it from Mrs. Sanders.

Away sped George Ryle to the cottage of Mrs. Sanders. He went through the small grove of trees, spoken of in connection with this fresh report; it was decidedly the nearest way to Barbrook and to the cottage from the upper road, but it was lonely and not much frequented. He found the woman busy

at the work which Mr. Dumps's interruption had not allowed her to finish the previous day—washing. With some unwillingness on her part and much circumlocution, George drew her tale from her. And to that evening we may as well go back for a few minutes, for we shall arrive at the conclusion much quicker than Mrs. Sanders will tell it us.

It was dark when Mrs. Sanders walked home from Barmester—Mr. Dumps not having had the politeness to drive her, as he did in going,—and she found her kitchen as she had left it. Her children—she had three besides Jim—were out in the world, Jim alone being at home with her. Mrs. Sanders lighted a candle, and surveyed the scene of discomfort: grate, black and cold; washing-tub on the wooden bench, wet clothes lying over it; bricks sloppy. "Drat that old Dumps!" ejaculated she. "I'd serve him out if I could. And I'd like to serve out that Jim, too. This comes of his dancing up to the Hold after Bridget with that precious puppy?"

She put things tolerably straight for the night, got herself some tea, and then began to think. Where *was* Jim? What had become of him? And did he or did he not have anything to do with the fire? Not wilfully; she could answer for that; but accidentally? She looked into vacancy, and shook her head in a timid and doubtful manner, for she knew that torches in rick-yards might prove dangerous adjuncts to suspicion.

"I wonder what they could do to him for't, happen they proved as it were a spark from his torch?" she deliberated. "Sure they'd never transport for an accident! Dumps said as transportation were too good for Jim, but——"

The colloquy was interrupted. The door burst open, and no less a personage entered than Jim himself. And Jim, as it appeared, was in a state of fright and agitation. His breath was coming fast, and his eyes had a wild, terrified stare in them.

With his presence, Mrs. Sanders's maternal apprehensions for his future safety merged into anger. She laid hold of Jim and shook him—shook him kindly, as she expressed it; but poor Jim did not find much kindness in it.

"I say, mother, what's that for?"

"That's what it's for," retorted his mother, giving him a sound box on the ear. "You'll dance out with puppies again up to that good-for-nothing minx of a Bridget!—and you'll set rick-yards a-fire!—and you'll go off and hide yourself, and let the place be searched by the perlice!—and me be drawed into trouble with it, and took off by that insolent Dumps in a stick-

up gig to Barmester, and lugged afore the court! You'll do that again, won't you? Now, where have you been?"

Jim made no return in kind. All the spirit the boy possessed seemed to have gone out of him. He sat down meekly on a broken chair, and began to shiver. "Don't mother," said he. "I've got a fright."

"Got a fright!" indignantly responded Mrs. Sanders. "And what sort of a fright do you suppose you have give to others? Happen Madam Chattaway might have died of it, they say. *You* talk of a fright! Who else hasn't been in a fright since you took the torch into that there rick-yard and set the ricks alight?"

"It isn't that," said Jim. "I ain't afraid of that; I didn't do it. Nora knows I didn't, and Mr. Apperley knows it, and Bridget knows it. I've no cause to be afeard of that."

"Then what are you quaking for?" angrily demanded Mrs. Sanders.

"I've just got a fright," he answered. "Mother, as true as we be here, Mr. Rupert's dead. I've just watched him killed."

Mrs. Sanders's first proceeding on the receipt of this information was to stare; her second to discredit it, to believe that Jim was out of his mind, or dreaming; her third to treat him to a second shaking. "Talk sense, will you?" cried she.

"I'm not a-talking nonsense," he answered. "Mother, I tell you as sure as us two be living here, I see it. It were in the grove, up by the leaning field. I saw him struck down, and I heard the breath go out of him."

The woman began to think there must be something in the tale. "It's Mr. Rupert you be talking of?"

"Yes, and it was him as set the rick a-fire. And now he's murdered! Didn't I run fast away! I was in mortal fear."

"Who killed him?"

Jim looked round timorously, as if thinking the walls might have ears. "I daren't say," he shivered.

"But you must say."

He shook his head. "No, I'll never tell it—wi'out I'm forced. He might be for killing *me*. When the hue and cry goes about to-morrow as he's dead, and folks is a-asking who did it, there'll be nobody to answer. I shall keep dark, 'cause I must. If Ann Canham had waited, though, and seen it, I'd not ha' minded saying; she'd ha' been a witness as I telled the truth."

"If you don't speak plainer I'll box your ears again," was the interruption. "What about Ann Canham?"

"Well, I met her at the top o' the leaning field as I was turning into't. That were but a few minutes afore. She'd been to work at the parson's, she said. I say, mother, you don't think they'll come after me here?" he questioned, his tone full of doubt.

"They *did* come after ye, to some purpose," wrathfully responded Mrs. Sanders. "My belief is as you've come home with your head turned. I'd like to know where you've been a-hiding."

"I've been nowhere but up in the tallet at master's," replied Jim. "I crep' in there last night; I was dead tired, and I never woke this morning. Hay do make one sleep; it's warmer nor a bed."

Leaving Mrs. Sanders to dispute this affirmation with him—and Jim contrived to parry her questions with skill—we need not follow any longer the interview. At the close of the night, she knew little more than she had known at its commencement beyond the assertion that Rupert Trevlyn was killed. Jim went off in the morning to his work as usual, and she resumed her labour of the day before. Nora had scarcely shown her wisdom in releasing Jim so quickly; but it may be that to keep him longer concealed in the "tallet" was next door to an impossibility.

Mrs. Sanders was interrupted in her work by George Ryle. She smoothed down the coarse towel pinned before her, and put her untidy hair behind her ears as her master entered. She was not much more tidy than she had been in the old days, when her children used to turn out ragged and dirty. He questioned her of the report which had been traced to her, and she disclosed to him what she had heard from Jim. It was not much in itself, but it had an air of mystery about it that George could not understand and did not like. He left her to go in search of Jim.

But another, as we have heard, had taken precedence of him in the search after that gentleman—Policeman Dumps. Mr. Dumps found him in the outbuildings at Trevlyn Farm, feeding the pigs as unconcernedly as though nothing had happened. The policeman's first move, fearful perhaps of a second escape, was to clap a pair of handcuffs on him.

"There, you young reptile! You'll go off again, will you, after doing murder!"

Now, in point of fact, Mr. Dumps had really no particular reason for using the concluding word. He only intended to imply that Mr. Jim's general delinquency of conduct deserved a strong name. Jim took it in a different light.

"It wasn't me as murdered him!" he said, terrified almost out of his life at the handcuffs. "I only see it done. What for should I murder him, Mr. Dumps?"

"Who's talking about murder?" cynically returned Dumps, forgetting probably that he had used the word. "The setting of the rick-yard on fire was enough for you, warn't it, without anything else added on to it?"

"Oh, you mean the fire," said Jim, considerably relieved. "I didn't do that neither, and there'll be plenty to prove it. I thought you meant the murder."

Policeman Dumps surveyed his charge critically, uncertain what to make of him. He proceeded to questioning; setting about it in a cunningly artistic manner that was perhaps characteristic of his calling.

"Which murder might be you a-meaning of, pray?"

"Mr. Rupert's."

"Mr.—— What be you a-talking of?" uttered Dumps, in the utmost astonishment, standing stock still to stare at Jim.

And now Jim Sanders found that he had been caught in a trap, one not expressly laid for him. He could have bitten out his tongue with vexation. That the death of Rupert Trevlyn would become public property, he had never doubted, but he had intended to remain silent upon the subject.

The handcuffs, coupled with the policeman's suggestive word, had led him into the mistake—the belief that he was taken up for the murder. It was too late to retract now, and he must make the best of it, and put up with the consequences.

"Who says that Mr. Rupert's murdered?" persisted Dumps.

"So he is," sullenly answered Jim. "But I didn't do it."

Mr. Dumps's rejoinder was to seize Jim by the collar, and march him off in the direction of the station as fast as his feet could go one before the other. The farming men, who had been collecting from two or three parts since the policeman's arrival, followed them to the fold-yard gate, and stood there to stare; they supposed he was taken on suspicion of having caused the fire. Nora, shut up in her dairy, had seen nothing of it, or there's no knowing but she might have flown out to the rescue.

Not another word was spoken; indeed the pace at which

Mr. Dumps chose to walk prevented it. When they reached the station, Mr. Chattaway was inside, talking with Bowen, his horse fastened to the railings which ran round the corner of the house. Jim went into a shivering fit at the sight of Mr. Chattaway, and strove to hide himself behind Policeman Dumps.

"So you have turned up, have you!" exclaimed Bowen. "And now, where did you get to yesterday?"

Jim did not answer; he appeared to wish to avoid Mr. Chattaway, and he trembled visibly. Bowen was on the point of inquiring what made him quake in that fashion, when Mr. Chattaway's voice broke out like a peal of thunder.

"How dared you be guilty of suppressing evidence? How dared you run away?"

Bowen turned the boy round, so that he should face him. "You just state where you got to, Jim Sanders."

"I didn't run away," replied Jim. "I lay down in the tallet at the farm atop o' the hay, and I never woke a'most all day yesterday. Miss Dickson, she can say as I was there, for she come and found me there at night, and she sent me off. There warn't no cause for me to run away," he somewhat fractiously repeated, as if weary of having to harp upon the same string. "It wasn't me that fired the rick."

"But you saw it fired?" cried Mr. Chattaway.

Jim stole round, so as to put Dumps between him and the questioner. Mr. Bowen brought him to again. "There's no cause for you to dodge about like that," cried he, repeating Jim's words. "You just speak up the truth; but you are not forced to say anything that'll criminate yourself."

"I can tell 'em," thought Jim to himself; "it won't hurt him, now he's dead. It was Mr. Rupert did it," he said aloud. "After he got the horsewhipping, he caught up the torch and pushed it into one o' the ricks; and that's the truth, as true as I be living."

"You saw him do this?"

"I was a-watching all the while. I was round the pales. He seemed like one a'most mad with passion, and it frighted me. I pulled the burning hay out o' the rick; I thought I pulled it all out, but I suppose a spark must ha' stopped in. I was frighted worse afterwards when the flames burst out, and I ran off for the engines. I telled Mr. Apperley as I'd been for 'em when I met him at night, and I telled him true."

The boy's earnest tones, his honest eyes, the whole expression of his face, lifted to Bowen's, convinced that experienced officer

that it was the truth. But he chose to gaze still implacably at the culprit, not to relax by so much as a semitone his sternness of voice.

"Then what made you go and hide yourself? Come! out with the truth."

Jim's eyes fell now, and his face grew confused. "I was a'most tired to death," he said, "and I crep' up into the tallet at master's, and I went to sleep. And I never woke in the morning, when I ought to ha' woke."

There was just sufficient probability in this for Bowen to know that it *might* be true. Before he could go on with his questions he was interrupted by Mr. Chattaway.

"He has confessed sufficient, Bowen—that it was Rupert Trevlyn. But he deserves punishment for the trouble he has put everybody to; and there must be a fresh examination now. Keep him in safety here, and take care that he's not tampered with. I am obliged to go to Blackstone to-day, but the hearing can take place to-morrow, if you'll apprise the magistrates. And—Bowen—mind you accomplish that other matter to-day that I have charged you with."

The last sentence, spoken most emphatically and slowly, Mr. Chattaway turned round to deliver as he was going out. Bowen nodded his head in acquiescence; and Mr. Chattaway mounted his horse and rode off in the direction of Blackstone.

Jim Sanders, looking the picture of ruefulness in his handcuffs, stood awkwardly in the corner of the room; it was a square room, with a boarded floor; a bench ran along one side of its whitewashed walls, and a railed-off desk was opposite. Bowen had gone within these rails as Mr. Chattaway departed, and was busy writing down a few detached words or sentences, that looked like memoranda. Dumps was gazing after the retreating figure of Mr. Chattaway.

"Dumps, call Chigwell here," said Bowen, glancing at the small door which led into the inner premises. "There's work for you both to-day."

But before Dumps could move to do this, he was half-knocked over by the haste with which some one entered. It was George Ryle. He took in a comprehensive view of affairs at a glance: Bowen writing; Dumps doing nothing; Mr. Jim Sanders in his handcuffs.

"Oh, you have come to grief, have you?" said George to the latter. "You are just the man I wanted to find, Jim. Bowen," he added, going within the railings and lowering his

voice to an undertone, "have you heard of this report about Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I have heard he is probably off, sir," was Bowen's answer. "Two of the men are going out now to look after him. Mr. Chattaway has signed a warrant for his apprehension."

George paused. "There is a report that he is dead," he resumed.

"Dead!" echoed Bowen, aghast. "Rupert Trevlyn dead! Why, who says it?"

George looked round at Jim. The boy stood white and shivery; but before any questions could be asked of him, Dumps, who had heard the words, came forward and spoke.

"*He* was talking of that," he said to Bowen, indicating Jim. "When I clapped them handcuffs on him, he turned as scared as a girl, and began denying that it was him that did the murder. I asked him what he meant by a murder, and who was murdered, and he said it was Mr. Rupert Trevlyn."

The man, Bowen, looked thunderstruck, little as it is in the way of police officers to show emotion of any kind. "Why, what grounds can he have for saying that?" he exclaimed, gazing keenly at Jim. "Mr. Ryle, where did you hear the report?"

"I heard it just now at Trevlyn Hold. It had been carried there, and would have alarmed them very much had they believed it. Mr. Chattaway was away, and Miss Trevlyn requested me to inquire into it, and bring back news—as she assumed I should—of its absurdity. I believe we must go to Jim for information," added George, looking at him as keenly as did Bowen. "I have traced the report to him."

Bowen beckoned Jim within the railings, and he came; there was just sufficient space for the three to cluster there. Dumps stood outside, leaning his elbow on the bars. "Have you been doing mischief to Mr. Rupert Trevlyn?" asked the superintendent.

"Me!" echoed Jim—and it was evident that his astonishment at Bowen's question was genuine. "I'd not have hurted a hair of his head," he added, bursting into tears. "I couldn't sleep for vexing over it. It wasn't me."

Bowen quietly took off the handcuffs, and laid them on the desk. "There," said he, in a kindlier tone; "now you can talk at your ease. Let us hear about this."

"I'm afeard, sir," responded Jim.

"There's nothing to be afeard of, if so be as you are inno-

cent. Do you know of any ill having happened to Mr. Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I know that he's dead; dead and all for good," answered Jim. "They blowed me up for saying it was him that set the rick a-fire, and I was sorry I had said it; but now he's gone, it don't matter, and I can say still that it was him fired it."

"Who blowed you up?" returned Bowen.

"Some on 'em," answered Jim, after a moment given to considering how he could best evade the question. Jim believed it would not do at all to say, "Miss Dickson and Madam Chattaway." Rupert was a favourite of the boy's; he would almost have laid down his life for him.

"Well, what is this about Mr. Rupert? If you are afraid to tell me, tell your master there," suggested Bowen. "I'm sure he is a kind master to you; all the parish knows that."

"It *must* be told, Jim," said George Ryle, impressively, as he laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "What are you afraid of?"

"Mr. Chattaway might kill me for telling, sir," said unwilling Jim.

"Nonsense! Mr. Chattaway would be as anxious to know the truth as we are."

"But if it was him did it?" whispered Jim, glancing fearfully round the whitewashed walls of the room, as he had glanced around those of his mother's cottage.

A blank pause. Mr. Bowen looked at George, whose face had turned hectic with the surprise, the emotion, the *dread* that the words had brought. "You must speak out, Jim," was all he said.

"It was in the little grove last night," rejoined the boy. "I was running home after Nora Dickson turned me out o' the tallet, and when I got up to 'em they was having words——"

"Who were having words?" was George Ryle's interruption.

"Mr. Chattaway and Master Rupert. I was scared, and I crep' in amid the trees, and they never saw me. And then I heard blows give, and I looked out and saw Mr. Rupert struck down to the earth, and he fell as one who hasn't got no life in him, and I heard the last breath go out of his body with a sort of sigh, and I knew he was dead. It was just like the sigh as mother's dead brother gave when the last breath went out of him."

"And what then?—what happened next?" asked Bowen.

"I don't know, sir. I come off then, and got into mother's. I didn't dare tell her it was Chattaway killed him. I wouldn't tell it now, only you force me."

Bowen was revolving things in his mind, this and that. "It's not five minutes ago that Chattaway gave me orders to have Rupert Trevlyn searched for and taken up to-day," he muttered, more in soliloquy than to Mr. Ryle. "He knew that he was skulking somewhere in the neighbourhood, he said; skulking, that was the word. I don't know what to think of this."

Neither did his hearers know what to think of it, Mr. Jim Sanders possibly excepted. "I wonder—I wonder," slowly resumed Bowen, a curious light coming into his eyes, "I wonder what brought those scratches on the face of Mr. Chattaway?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

FERMENT.

STRANGE rumours went abroad in the neighbourhood of Trevlyn Hold, and the excitement increased hourly. Mr. Chattaway had killed Rupert Trevlyn—so ran the gossip—and Jim Sanders was in custody with the handcuffs on. Before the night of the day on which you saw Jim in the police-station, these reports, with many wild and almost impossible additions, were current, and spreading largely.

With the exception of the accusation made by Jim Sanders, the only corroboration to the tale appeared to rest in the fact that Rupert Trevlyn was not to be found. Dumps and his brother-policeman scoured the locality high and low, and could find no traces whatever of him. Sober lookers-on (but it is rare to find sober ones in a time of great excitement) regarded this fact as favourable. Had Rupert really been murdered, or even accidentally killed by a chance blow from Mr. Chattaway, surely his body would be forthcoming to confirm the tale. But there were not wanting others who believed, and who did not shrink from the avowal, that Mr. Chattaway was quite capable of suppressing all signs of the affray, including the dead body itself; though by what sleight-of-hand the act could have been accomplished seemed likely to remain a mystery.

Before Mr. Chattaway got home from Blackstone in the evening, all the rumours, good and bad—all the facts, what few there were—were known at Trevlyn Hold.

Mr. Chattaway was not unprepared to find this the case. In returning, he had turned his horse to the police-station, and reined in. Bowen, who saw him, came out.

"Has he been taken?" demanded Mr. Chattaway.

He put the question in an earnestness of tone, some impatience dashed with it, that was apparently genuine. "No, he has not," replied Bowen, stroking his chin, taking note of Mr. Chattaway's face—its expression and its scratches, and anything else that was remarkable about it. "Dumps and Chigwell have been at it all day; are at it still; but as yet without result."

"Then they are laggards at their work!" retorted Mr. Chattaway, his countenance darkening. "He was wandering about the place last night, Bowen, and he's sure to be not far off it to-day. By Heaven, he shall be unearthed! If there's any trick being played, any screening going on, as I know there was yesterday with regard to that Jim Sanders, I'll have the actors in it brought to justice!"

Bowen came out of a reverie. "Would you be so good as to step inside for a few minutes, Mr. Chattaway? I have a word to say to you."

Mr. Chattaway got off his horse, hooked the bridle to the rails, as he had hooked it in the morning, and followed Bowen in. The man saw that the doors were closed, and then spoke.

"There's a tale flying about, Mr. Chattaway, that Rupert Trevlyn has come to some harm. Do you know anything of it?"

"Not I," slightingly answered Mr. Chattaway. "What harm should come to him?"

"It is said that you and he met last night, had some sort of encounter by moonlight, and that Rupert was—was—in short, that some violence was done him."

For a full minute they remained looking at each other. The policeman appeared intent on biting the feathers of his pen; in reality, he was studying the face of Mr. Chattaway with a comprehensive and critical acumen that his apparently careless demeanour imparted little idea of. He saw the blood mount up under the dark skin; he saw the eye lighten with emotion: but the emotion was more like that called forth by anger than

by guilt. At least, so the police officer judged; and habit had rendered him a pretty correct observer. Mr. Chattaway was the first to speak.

"How do you know that anything of the sort took place?—any interview?"

"It was watched—that is, accidentally seen. A person was passing at the time, and has mentioned it to-day."

"Who was the person?"

Bowen did not reply to the question. The omission may have been accidental, since he was hastening to put one on his own account.

"Do you deny this, Mr. Chattaway?"

"No. I wish I had the opportunity of acknowledging it to Mr. Rupert Trevlyn in the manner he deserves," continued Mr. Chattaway, in what looked like a blaze of anger.

"It is said that after the—the encounter, Rupert Trevlyn was left as one dead," cautiously resumed Bowen.

"Psha!" was the scornful retort. "Dead! He got up and ran away."

A very different account from that of Jim Sanders. Bowen was silent for a minute, endeavouring, most likely, to reconcile the two. "Have you any objection to state to me what took place, sir?"

"I don't know that I have," was the reply, somewhat sullenly delivered. "But I can't see what business it is of yours."

"People are taking up odd notions about it," said Bowen.

"People may be hanged! It's no concern of theirs."

"But if they come to me and oblige me to make it my concern?" returned the officer, in significant tones. "If it's all fair and above-board, you had better tell me, Mr. Chattaway. If it's not, perhaps the less you say the better."

It was a hint not calculated to conciliate a chafed spirit, and Mr. Chattaway resented it. "How dare you, Bowen, presume to throw out insinuations to me?" he cried, snatching his riding-whip off the counter, or desk, where he had laid it, and stalking towards the door. "I'll tell you nothing; and you may make the best and the worst of it. Find Rupert Trevlyn, if you must know it, and get it out of him. I ask you who has been spreading the rumour that I met Rupert Trevlyn last night?"

Bowen saw no reason why he should not disclose it. "It was Jim Sanders," he replied.

"Psha!" contemptuously ejaculated Mr. Chattaway: and he mounted his horse and rode away.

So that after this colloquy, Mr. Chattaway was in a degree prepared to find that unpleasant rumours had penetrated to the Hold. When he entered he could not avoid seeing the shrinking, timid looks cast on him by his children; the haughty, questioning face, of Miss Diana; the horror in that of Mrs. Chattaway. He took the same sullen, defiant tone with them that he had taken with Bowen, denying the thing by implication, more than by direct assertions. He asked them all whether they had gone out of their minds, that they should listen to senseless tales; and he threatened the most dire revenge against Rupert when he should be found.

Thus matters went on for a few days. But the rumours did not die away: on the contrary, they gathered strength and plausibility. Things were in a most uncomfortable state at the Hold: the family were tortured by dread and doubt that they dared not give utterance to, and strove to hide; the very servants went about with stealthy footsteps, casting covert glances at their master from dark corners, and running away to avoid a direct meeting with him. Mr. Chattaway could not help seeing all this, and it did not tend to give him equanimity.

The only thing, in the present temper of the public, that could clear up this miserable doubt, was the finding Rupert. But Rupert was not found. Friends and foes, police and public, put out their best endeavours to accomplish it; but no more trace could be discovered of Rupert than if he had never existed—or than if, as many openly said, he were buried in some quiet corner of Mr. Chattaway's grounds. To do Mr. Chattaway justice, he appeared the most anxious of any for Rupert's discovery: not with a view to clearing himself from any vile suspicion; *that* he cast completely into the shade, trampled it under his foot, as it were; but that Rupert might be brought to justice for the burning of the ricks.

Perhaps Mr. Chattaway's enemies may be pardoned for their suspicions. It cannot be denied that there were apparent grounds for them: many a man has been officially accused of murder upon less. There was the well-known ill-feeling which had long existed on Mr. Chattaway's part to Rupert; there was the fresh dread of being displaced by him, which had latterly arisen through the visit and boastings of Mr. Daw; there was the sore feeling excited on both sides by the business of the rick-yard and the subsequent examination; there was the night

contest spoken of by Jim Sanders, and which Mr. Chattaway did not deny; there were the scratches and bruise visible on that gentleman's face; and there was the total disappearance of Rupert. People could remember the blank look of disappointment which had passed over Mr. Chattaway's countenance when Rupert ran into the circle gathered round the pit at Blackstone. "He'd ha' bin glad that he were dead," they had murmured then one to another. "And happen he have put him out o' the way," they murmured now.

Perhaps they did not all go so far as to suspect Mr. Chattaway of the great crime of wilful, deliberate, premeditated murder: he might have killed him wilfully in the passion of the moment; he might have killed him accidentally by an unlucky blow that had done its work more effectually than had been intended. The fruitless search for Rupert—dead—was no barrier to these suspicions; murdered men had been hidden away before, and would be again.

I have not yet mentioned the last point of suspicion, but it was one much dwelt upon—the late return of Mr. Chattaway to his home on the night in question. The servants had not failed to talk of this, and the enemies outside took it up and discussed it eagerly. It was most unusual for Mr. Chattaway to be away from home at night. An unsociable man by nature, and a man whose company was not sought by his neighbours—for they disliked him—it was a rare thing for Mr. Chattaway to spend his evenings out. He attended evening parties now and then in the company of his wife and Miss Trevlyn, but it was not once a year that he was invited out alone. His absence therefore on this night, coupled with his late entrance, close upon midnight, was the more remarkable. Where had he been until that hour? Every one wondered: every one asked it. Mr. Chattaway carelessly answered his wife and Miss Diana that he had been on business at Barbrook; but he condescended to give no reply or satisfaction whatever to any other living mortal amongst the wonderers. In revenge, they jumped to a very sensational, melodramatic, and unlikely conclusion—"happen he were diggin' a grave." Some, of more audacity than the rest, endeavoured to impress this conclusion on Superintendent Bowen, but that wise officer shook his head, and thought it very improbable.

Altogether affairs were in anything but a calm or satisfactory state. Public feeling was growing more excited, and it was openly said that an investigation must take place. The narrow

grove of trees was haunted by idlers, looking after traces of any recent disturbance of the ground there: they stamped on the path to test its sound, they wound themselves in and out amidst the trunks, they peered curiously into the neighbouring grass.

Things could not remain as they were. They must fall to a calm, or rise to an explosion. As the days went on without news of Rupert, Mr. Chattaway expressed a conviction that Rupert had made his way to Mr. Daw, and was being sheltered there. A most unsatisfactory conviction for Mr. Chattaway, if he really and genuinely had come to it. With those two together to hatch their plots against him, he could never know a moment's peace. He was most explosive against Rupert; at home and abroad he never ceased to utter his threats of prosecuting him for the crime of which he had been guilty. He rode every other day to the station, worrying Bowen, asking whether any trace of the felon had turned up. He urged—this was in the first day or so of the disappearance—that houses and cottages should be visited and searched. Bowen quite laughed at the suggestion. If Mr. Chattaway had cause to suspect any particular house or cottage, they might perhaps go the length of getting a warrant to search it; but to enter dwellings indiscriminately would be a procedure intolerable and unjustifiable.

Mr. Chattaway was unable to say that he had cause especially to suspect any house or cottage: unless, he added in his temper, it might be Trevlyn Farm. It appeared Jim Sanders had been hiding there in an outbuilding: why not Rupert Trevlyn? But Bowen saw and knew that it was only in his exasperation that Mr. Chattaway had spoken. Trevlyn Farm was no more likely to conceal Rupert Trevlyn than any other house of its standing—in fact less likely; for Mrs. Ryle would not have permitted it to be done. Her dislike to any sort of underhand dealing was so great, that she would not have concealed Rupert, or countenanced his being concealed, had it been to save him from hanging. In that she resembled Miss Diana Trevlyn. Miss Diana would have spent her last shilling nobly to defend Rupert on his trial—had it come to a trial—but ignominiously to conceal him from the reach of the law, *that* she would never have done. The remark of Chattaway's travelled to George Ryle: George happened to meet Bowen the same day, not an hour after, and he spoke of it. He told Bowen that the bare idea of Rupert's being concealed on their premises was absurd,

and he said, on his word of honour, not only that he did not know where Rupert was, but where he was likely to be: the thing was to him a complete mystery. Bowed nodded. In Bowen's opinion the notion of his being concealed in any house was all moonshine.

The days went on and on, and it did appear very mysterious where Rupert could be, or what had been his fate. His clothes, his effects, all remained unclaimed and uncalled for at Trevlyn Hold. When Mrs. Chattaway came unexpectedly upon anything that had belonged to him, she turned quite sick with the fears that darted across her heart. A faint hope arose within her at times, that Rupert had gone, as Mr. Chattaway loudly, and perhaps others more secretly, surmised, to Mr. Daw in his far-off home in the Pyrenees, but it was rejected almost as soon as felt. She knew, none better, that Rupert had no means, no money to carry him thither. Oh, how often, how often did she wish in her heart of hearts, that they had never usurped Trevlyn Hold! It seemed that they were beginning to reap all the bitter fruits, which had been so long ripening.

But this supposition was soon to be set aside. Two letters arrived from Mr. Daw: one to Mr. Freeman, the other to Rupert himself; and they completely did away with the idea that had been obtaining—that Rupert Trevlyn had found his way thither.

It appeared that Rupert had written an account to Mr. Daw of these unhappy circumstances; of his setting the rick on fire in his passion, and his being arrested for it. He had written it on the evening of the day he was discharged from custody. And by the contents of his letter, it was evident that he then contemplated returning to the Hold.

"These letters from Mr. Daw settle the question—that Rupert has not gone there," observed Mr. Freeman. "But they make the mystery, of where he can be, greater."

Yes, they did. And the news went forth to the neighbourhood that Rupert Trevlyn had written a letter subsequent to the examination at Barmester, wherein he stated that he was going straight home to the Hold. Gossip never loses in the carrying, you know.

Jim Sanders, who had given his testimony as to what he saw of the setting of the rick on fire, and was discharged and at work again, became quite the lion of the day. He had never been made so much of in his life. Tea here, supper there, sups of ale everywhere. Everybody was asking Jim the particulars of

that later night, and Jim, nothing loth, gave them, with the addition of his own comments.

And the days went on, and the ferment and the doubts increased.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN APPLICATION TO A MAGISTRATE.

THE ferment increased. The arguments obtaining in the neighbourhood were worthy of being listened to, if only from a curiously logical point of view. If Rupert Trevlyn in his own handwriting had stated that he was going home to the Hold on the termination of the day's proceedings at Barmester; and if Rupert Trevlyn (as was evident) never did get to the Hold, clearly it was Mr. Chattaway who had killed and buried him. Absurd as the deduction may be to you, my calm readers, judging from a sensible, dispassionate point of view, to those excited gentry, the public, it appeared not only a feasible but a certain conclusion. The thing could not rest; interviews were held with Mr. Peterby, who was supposed to be the only person who could take up the matter on the part of the missing and ill-used Rupert; and that gentleman bestirred himself to make inquiries. Which he set about in secret.

One dark night, between eight and nine, the inmates of the lodge were disturbed by a knocking at their door—a loud imperative knocking, as if the applicant brought with him both impatience and authority. Ann Canham—trying her poor eyes over some dark sewing by the light of the small and solitary candle—started from her chair, and remarked that her heart had leaped into her mouth.

Which may have been a reason, possibly, for her standing still, face and hands uplifted in consternation, instead of answering the knock. It was repeated, and more imperatively.

Old Canham turned his head and looked at her. He was smoking his last evening pipe over the fire. "Thee must open it, Ann."

Ann, seeing no help for it, went meekly to the door, wringing her hands. What she expected might be at the door, or what she feared, was best known to herself; but in point of

fact, since Bowen, the superintendent, had pounced upon her a few days before, as she was going by the police-station, had handed her inside, and put her through sundry questions as we put a boy through his catechism, she had lived in a state of tremor. She may have concluded it was Bowen at the door now, with the fellow-pair of handcuffs to those which had been fitted on Jim Sanders.

It proved to be Mr. Peterby. Ann looked surprised, but lost three parts of her tremor. Dropping her humble curtsey, she was about to ask his pleasure, when he brushed past her without ceremony, and stepped into the kitchen.

"Shut the door," were his first words to her. "How are you, Canham?"

Mark had risen, and stood with doubtful gaze, wondering, no doubt, what the visit could mean. "I be but middlin', sir," he answered, pushing his pipe in the corner of the hearth. "We ain't none on us too well, sir, I reckon, with this uncertainty hanging over our minds, as to poor Master Rupert."

"It is the business I have come about. Sit down, Ann Canham," Mr. Peterby added, settling himself on the bench opposite Mark. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir," she meekly answered. But her hands shook so that she nearly dropped the work she had taken up.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," cried Mr. Peterby, noticing the emotion. "I am not going to accuse you of putting him out of sight, as it seems busy tongues are accusing somebody else. On the night that this took place, the encounter spoken of between Mr. Chattaway and Rupert Trevlyn, you were passing, I believe, near the spot. You must tell me all you saw. First of all, as I am told, you encountered Rupert."

Ann Canham raised her shaking hand to her brow, and wiped the moisture that had gathered there. Mr. Peterby had begun his questioning in a hard, matter-of-fact tone, as if he were examining a witness in court, and it did not tend to reassure her. Ann Canham was often laughed at for her timidity. She gave him the account of her interview with Rupert as correctly as she could remember it.

"He said nothing to you of his intention of going off anywhere?" asked Mr. Peterby, when she had finished.

"Not a word, sir. He said he had nowhere to go to; if he went to the Hold, Mr. Chattaway might be for horsewhipping him again. He said he thought he should lie down under the trees till morning."

"Did you leave him there?"

"I left him sitting on the stile, sir, eating the bread. He had complained of hunger, and I got him to take a part of a cake which Mrs. Freeman had given me for my father."

"You told Bowen, the superintendent at the police-station, that you asked him to take refuge in the lodge for the night?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, after a slight pause. "Mr. Bowen, he put a heap of questions to me, and what with being confused at 'em, and the fright of his calling me into the place, I didn't well know what I said in answer to him."

"But you did ask Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I asked him if he'd be pleased to take shelter in the lodge till the morning, as he seemed to have nowhere to go to. But he spoke out quite sharp, like, at my asking it, and said, did I think he wanted to get me and father into trouble with Mr. Chattaway? So I went away, sir, leaving him there."

"Well, now, just tell me whom you met afterwards."

"I hadn't got above three-parts up the field, sir—it's up-hill, you know—when I met Mr. Chattaway. I stood aside off the narrow path to let him pass, and wished him good night, but he didn't answer me: he went on. Just about as I came close to the road-stile, I see Jim Sanders coming over it, so I asked him where he had been, and how he had got back again, having heard that he'd not been found all day, and he answered rather impertinently that he'd been up in the moon. The moon was uncommon bright that night, sir, which perhaps made him think to say it," she simply added.

"Was that all Jim Sanders said?"

"Yes, sir, every word. He went on down the path as if he was in a hurry."

"In the same direction that Mr. Chattaway had taken?"

"Just the same. There is but that one path, sir."

"And that was the last you saw of them?"

Ann Canham stopped to snuff the candle before she answered. "That was all, sir. I was hastening to get back to father, knowing he'd be wanting me, for I was late. Mr. Bowen, he kep' on telling me it was strange I heard nothing of the encounter, but I never did. I must ha' been out of the field long afore Mr. Chattaway could get up to Master Rupert."

"Pity but you had waited and gone back," observed Mr. Peterby, musingly. "It might have prevented what occurred."

"Pity, perhaps, but I had, sir. But it never once came into my head that anything bad would come of their meeting.

Since, after I came to know what did happen, I wondered I had not thought of it. But if I had, sir, I shouldn't have dared to go back after Mr. Chattaway. It wouldn't have been my place."

Mr. Peterby sat looking at Ann, as she thought. In point of fact, he was so buried in reflection as to see nothing. He rose from the settle. "And this is all you know about it! Well, it amounts to nothing beyond establishing the fact that all three—Rupert Trevlyn, Mr. Chattaway, and the boy—were on the spot at that time. Good night, Canham. I hope your rheumatism will get easier."

Ann Canham opened the door to him, and wished him good night. When he was fairly gone she slipped the bolt, and stood with her back against the door, either for extra security, or to recover her equanimity.

"Father, my heart was in my mouth all the time he were here," she repeated. "See,"—holding out her shaking hands —"see the twitter I be in."

"More stupid you!" was the sympathizing answer of old Canham.

The public ferment, I say, did not lessen, and the matter was at length carried before the magistrates; in so far as that the advice of one of them was asked by Mr Peterby. It happened that Mr. Chattaway had gone this very day to Barmester. He was standing at the entrance to the inn-yard where he generally put up, when his solicitor, Mr. Flood, approached, evidently in a state of excitement.

"What a mercy that I found you!" he exclaimed, out of breath. "Jackson told me you were in town. Come along!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"Matter? There's enough the matter. Peterby's before the magistrates at this very moment preferring a charge against you for having murdered Rupert Trevlyn. I got a word of it dropped to me in the oddest manner, and——"

"*What* do you say?" interrupted Mr. Chattaway, his face in a blaze, as he stood stock still, and refused to stir another step without an answer.

"Come along, I say. There's some application being made to the magistrates about you, and my advice is—— Mr. Chattaway," added the lawyer, in a deeper, almost an agitated tone, as he abruptly broke off his words, "I assume that you are innocent of this. You *are*?"

"Before Heaven, I am innocent!" thundered Mr. Chattaway. "What do you mean, Flood?"

"Then make haste. My advice to you is, go right into the midst of it, and confront Peterby. Don't let the magistrates hear only one side of the question, by which they would prejudge it. Make your explanation to them, and let these nasty rumours be set at rest. It is my opinion that you ought to have done so at first."

Apparently eager as himself now, Mr. Chattaway strode along. They found on reaching the courts that some indifferent cause was being heard by the magistrates, nothing at all connected with Mr. Chattaway. But the explanation was obtained. Mr. Peterby was in a private room with one of the Bench only —a Captain Mynn. With scant ceremony the interview was broken in upon by the intruders.

There was no formal complaint being made, no accusation being lodged, or warrant applied for. Mr. Peterby, who was on terms of intimacy with Captain Mynn, was laying the case before him unofficially, and asking his advice as a friend. A short explanation on either side ensued, and Mr. Peterby turned to Mr. Chattaway.

"I have had this forced upon me," he said. "I have been urged for days and days past to apply for a warrant against you; and I have declined. But the thing is going so far, public opinion is becoming, I may say, so urgent, that I find if I don't act, it will be taken out of my hands, and given to those who have less scruple than I. I resolved, therefore, to adopt a medium course; and I came here asking Captain Mynn's opinion as a friend—not as a magistrate—whether I should have sufficient grounds for acting. For myself, I honestly confess I think them very slight; and I assure you, Mr. Chattaway, that I am no enemy of yours, although it may look like it at this moment."

"By whom have you been urged to this?" coldly asked Mr. Chattaway.

"By more than I should care to name: the public, to give them a collective term. But how the wonder you obtained cognizance that I was here, I can't make out," he added, turning to Mr. Flood. "Not a soul knew of my coming."

"As we have met here, we had better have it out," was Mr. Flood's answer, disregarding the question. "It is my advice to Mr. Chattaway, and he wishes it. If Mr. Mynn hears your side unofficially he must, in justice, hear ours. That's fair, all the world over."

It was, doubtless, a not very usual, perhaps not an orthodox,

mode of proceeding; but I can tell you that things far more unorthodox than that, are done in local courts every day. Mr. Mynn knew by public rumour all particulars of the suspicion, just as well as Mr. Peterby could state them, but he listened attentively, as in civility bound. Mr. Chattaway did not deny the encounter with Rupert: he never had denied it. He acknowledged that they were neither of them very cool; that Rupert was the first to strike, and that he, Rupert, fell down, or was knocked down. Immediately upon that, he, Mr Chattaway, heard a noise, went to see what it was, and found they had had an eavesdropper, who was then making off across the field, on the other side the grove. He, Mr. Chattaway, angry at the fact, gave pursuit, in the hope of identifying the intruder (whom he had since discovered to be Jim Sanders), but was unable to catch him, the pursued proving himself considerably the fleeter runner. When he got back to the spot, Rupert was gone.

"How long may you have been absent?" inquired Captain Mynn of Mr. Chattaway.

"About six or seven minutes, I think. I ran to the other end of the field, and looked into the lane, but the boy had escaped out of sight, and I then walked back again. It would take about seven minutes; the field is large."

"And after that?"

"I found, as I tell you, that Rupert had disappeared, and I re-traversed the ground over the lower field, and went on to Barbrook, where I had business. I never saw Rupert Trevlyn after I left him on the ground. The inference, therefore—nay, the absolute certainty—is, that he must have taken the opportunity of my absence to get up and escape."

A pause. "You did not get home, I believe, until twelve at night, or thereabouts," remarked Captain Mynn. "Some doubts have been raised—of which you are, no doubt, aware—as to where you could have spent your time."

And this question led to the very core of the suspicion. Mr. Chattaway appeared to feel that it did, and he hesitated. He had spoken in a free, open manner enough, quite different from the ungracious and sullen one that generally characterized him; but he hesitated now.

"Strange to say," he resumed, "I could not account for the whole of my time that evening. That is, if I were called upon to account for it by proof, I am not sure that it could be furnished. I was very anxious to see Hurnall, the agent for the

Boorfield mines, and that's where I went. My son had brought me home news from Blackstone, that they were going to force me to make certain improvements in my pit, and I wanted to consult Hurnall about it. He is up to every trick and turn, and knows what they can compel an owner to do, and what they can't. When I reached Hurnall's house, he was out; might return home immediately, the servant said, or might not be home till very late. She asked me if I could go in and wait; but I had no fancy for sitting in a close room, after being stifled all day in the close court *here*, and I said I would walk about. I walked about for two mortal hours before Hurnall came; and then I went indoors with him. That's the whole truth, I'll swear."

"Then I'd have avowed it before, had I been you," cried Mr. Peterby. "It's your want of self-defence that has done half the mischief, and given colouring to the suspicions."

"Self-defence!" cried Mr. Chattaway, throwing his head back. "When a man's accused of murder by a set of brainless idiots, it is punishment he'd like to give them, not self-defence."

"Ah!" said the lawyer, "but we can't always do as we like: if we could, the world might be better worth living in."

Mr. Chattaway turned to the magistrate. "I have told you the whole truth, so far as I know it; and you may judge whether these unneighbourly reports have not merited all my contempt. You can question Hurnall, who will tell you where he met me, and how long I stayed with him afterwards. As to Rupert Trevlyn, I have no more idea where he is than Mr. Peterby himself has. He will turn up some time, there's not the least doubt about it; and I solemnly declare that I'll then bring him to justice, should it be ten years hence."

There was nothing more for Mr. Chattaway to say or to wait for, and he went out with his solicitor. Mr. Peterby turned to Captain Mynn with a questioning glance.

The magistrate shook his head. "My opinion is that you cannot proceed with this, Mr. Peterby. Were you to bring the matter officially before the Bench, I for one would not entertain it; neither, I am sure, would my brother-magistrates. Mr. Chattaway is no favourite of ours, but he must receive justice. That there are points of suspicion connected with the case, I can't deny; but every one may be explained away. If what he says be true, they are explained away."

"All but the two hours, when he says he was walking about, waiting for Hurnall,"

"It may have been so. No; upon these very slight grounds, it is of no use to press for a warrant against Mr. Chattaway. The very enormity of the crime would almost be its answer. A gentleman of position and property, a county magistrate, guilty of the crime of murder in these enlightened days! Nonsense, Mr. Peterby!"

And Mr. Peterby echoed the words in his own mind; and went forth prepared to echo it to those who had urged him on to ask whether the charge could be made.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FRIGHT FOR ANN CANHAM.

So the magistrates declined to interfere, and Mr. Chattaway went about a free man. But not an untainted one; for the neighbourhood was still free in its comments, and openly accused him of having made away with Rupert. Mr. Chattaway had his retaliation: he offered a reward for the recovery of the incendiary Rupert Trevlyn, and the walls for miles round were placarded with handbills. The police, urged to it by him, recommenced their search with vigour, and Mr. Chattaway actually talked of sending to the metropolis for an experienced detective. One thing was indisputable—that if Rupert were in life he must keep himself from the neighbourhood of Trevlyn Hold. Nothing could save him from the law, if taken the second time. Jim Sanders would not be kidnapped again, to prevent his proving the firing of the rick; he had already testified to it officially; and Mr. Chattaway's vengeance was athirst for satisfaction.

Take it for all in all, it was well-nigh breaking the heart of Mrs. Chattaway. Looking at it in any light, it was bad enough. The fear touching her husband, not the less startling and terrible from its excessive improbability, was dissipated, for he had succeeded in convincing her that he was, so far, innocent; but her fears for Rupert kept her in a perpetual state of inward terror. Miss Diana publicly condemned Rupert. This hiding from justice (if he was hiding) she regarded as only in a degree less reprehensible than the crime itself; as did Mrs. Ryle; and had Miss Diana met Rupert returning home some fine day, she would have laid her hand upon him as effectually as Mr. Dumps himself, and said, "You shall not go again." Do not mistake

Miss Diana: it would not have pleased her to see Rupert—a Trevlyn—standing at the bar of a public tribunal to be judged by the laws of his country. What she would have done was, to take Rupert home to the Hold, marshalled by her hand, and say to Chattaway, "Here he is, but you must forgive him: you must forgive him, because he is a Trevlyn; and a Trevlyn cannot be brought to disgrace." Miss Diana had full confidence in her own power to command this. Others wisely doubted whether any amount of interference on any part would avail now with Mr. Chattaway. His wife felt that it would not. She felt that were poor Rupert to venture home, even twelve months to come, trusting that time and clemency had effected his pardon, he would be sacrificed: between Miss Diana's and Mr. Chattaway's opposing policies, he would inevitably be sacrificed. Altogether, Mrs. Chattaway's life was more painful now Rupert had gone than it had been when he was at home.

Cris was against Rupert; Octave was bitterly against him; Maude went about the house with a white face and shrinking heart, her health and spirits giving way under the tension. Suspense is, of all evils, the worst to bear: and they who loved Rupert, Maude and her aunt Edith, were hourly and daily victims to it. The bow was always strung. On the one hand was the latent doubt that he had come to some violent end that night, in spite of Mr. Chattaway's denial; and they could not divest themselves of it, try as they would, or of the wretched speculation it brought in its train. On the other hand, was the lively dread that he was but concealing himself, and might be discovered by the police any day that the sun rose. They had speculated so much upon where he could be, that the ever-recurring thought brought now only its heart-sickness; and Maude had the additional pain of hearing petty shafts launched at her because she was his sister. Mrs. Chattaway prayed upon her bended knees that, hard to be borne as the suspense was, Rupert might not come back until time should have softened the heart of Mr. Chattaway, and the grievous charge pending against Rupert be done away with for the want of a prosecutor.

Nora was in the midst of bustle at Trevlyn Farm. And Nora was also in a temper. It was the annual custom there, when the busy time of harvest was quite over, to institute a general house-renovating: summer curtains were taken down, and winter ones were put up, carpets were shaken, floors and paint scoured;

and the place, in short, to use an ordinary expression, was turned inside out.

There was more than usual to be done this year: for, mendings and alterations had to be made in sundry curtains, and the upholstering woman, named Brown, had been at Trevlyn Farm the last day or two, getting forward with her task. The ruse made use of by Nora in the court at Barmester, to wile Farmer Apperley to a private conference, had really held some point in it, for negotiations were going on with that industrious member of the upholstering society, through Mrs. Apperley, who had recommended her to Nora.

Mrs. Brown sat in the centre of a pile of curtains, plying her needle steadily: the finishing stitches were being put to the work; at least, they would be before night should fall. Mrs. Brown, a sallow woman with a chronic cold in her head, preferred to work in outdoor costume; a black poke bonnet and faded woollen red plaid shawl crossed over her shoulders. Nora stood by her in a very angry mood, her arms folded, just as though she had nothing to do: which would be a circumstance to be recorded in these cleaning times.

For Nora never let the grass grow under her feet, or under any one else's feet, when there was work to do. By dint of beginning hours before daylight, and keeping at it hours after nightfall—in point of fact, by making that one day in the year four-and-twenty hours long instead of twelve—she succeeded in getting it all over in the day. Herself, Nanny, and Ann Canham put their best energies into it, one or two of the men were set to rub up the mahogany furniture, and Mrs. Ryle had to dispense almost entirely with being waited upon. And Nora's present anger arose from the fact that Ann Canham, by some extraordinary mischance, had not made her appearance.

It was bringing things almost to a standstill, as Nora complained to Mrs. Brown. The two cleaners of the rooms were Nanny and Ann Canham. Nanny was doing her part, but what was to become of the other part? And where could Ann Canham be? Nora kept her eyes turned to the window, as she talked and grumbled, watching for the return of Jim Sanders, whom she had despatched to see after Ann.

Presently she saw him approaching, and went to the door and threw it open long before the lad could reach it. "She can't come," he called out, at length.

"Not come!" echoed Nora, in wrathful consternation, look-

ing as if she felt inclined to beat Jim for bringing the message. "What on earth does she mean by that?"

"Well, she said her father was poorly, and she couldn't leave him," returned Jim.

Nora could scarcely speak for indignation. Old Canham, as was known to all the neighbourhood, had been ailing for years, and it had never kept Ann at home before. "I don't believe it," said she, in her perplexity.

"I don't think I do, neither," returned Jim. "I'm a'most sure that old Canham was sat right afore the fire, a-smoking his pipe as usual. She drawed the door to behind her, all in a hurry, while she talked to me, but not afore I see old Canham there. I be next to certain on it."

Nora could not understand the state of affairs. Ann Canham, humble, industrious, grateful for any day's work offered to her, had never failed to come, when engaged, in all Barbrook's experience. What was to be done? The morrow was Saturday; and, to have the cleaning extend to that day (as it inevitably would, failing the help of Ann Canham), would have upset the farm's regularity and Nora's temper for a month. In fact, there was a doubt of its being done, as it was; for Ann ought to have been there and at work hours before.

Nora took a sudden resolution. She snatched her bonnet and shawl from the pegs where they hung, and set off for the lodge, determined to bring Ann Canham back willing or unwilling, or to know the reason why This *contretemps* in the yearly cleaning would never be forgotten by Nora during life.

Without any superfluous ceremony of knocking, Nora proceeded to open the door and enter when she reached the lodge. But the door was locked. "What can that be for?" ejaculated Nora—for she had never known the lodge door to be locked in the daytime. "She expects I shall come after her, and thinks she'll keep me out!"

Without the intervention of an instant, Nora's face was at the window, to reconnoitre the interior. She saw the smock-frock of old Mark disappearing through the opposite door, as quickly as was consistent with his rheumatic state. Nora rattled at the handle of the door with one hand, and knocked sharply on its panel with the other. Ann opened it.

"Now then, Ann Canham, what's the meaning of this?" she began, pushing past Ann, who stood in the way, almost as if she would have kept her out.

"I beg a humble pardon, ma'am, a hundred times," was the

low, deprecating answer. "I'd do anything a'most, rather nor disappoint—such a thing I'm sure as never happened to me yet—but I'm obliged. Father, he's too poorly for me to leave him."

Nora surveyed her critically. The woman was evidently in a state of discomfort, if not of terror. She was trembling visibly, in spite of her efforts to suppress it, and her lips were white.

"I got a boy to run down to Mrs. Sanders's this morning at daylight, and ask her to go in my place," resumed Ann Canham. "Until Jim came up here a short while agone, I never thought but what she had went."

"What's the reason *you* can't come?" demanded Nora, her tone one of uncompromising sternness.

"I'd come but for father. He——"

"You needn't peril your soul with deliberate untruths," interrupted angry Nora. "A woman at your age ought to fear 'em, Ann Canham. There's nothing the matter with your father; nothing that need hinder your coming out. If he's well enough to be here in the house place, smoking his pipe, he's well enough for you to leave him. He *was* smoking. Haven't I got the smoke now in my nostrils? and what's that?"—pointing to the pipe which her quick eyes had detected, pushed into a corner of the hearth.

Ann Canham stood the picture of confusion and helplessness under the reproach. She stammered out that she "daredn't leave him: he wasn't hisself to-day."

"He was enough himself to make off to avoid seeing me," said angry Nora. "What's to become of my cleaning? Who's to do it if you don't? I insist upon your coming, Ann Canham?"

It appeared almost beyond Ann Canham's courage to bring out a second refusal, and she burst into tears as she spoke it. She had never offended afore, and she hoped, if forgiven this time, never to offend again: but to leave her father that day was impossible.

And Nora had to take the refusal, and make the best of it. She went away, searching for the woman's motive, and came to the conclusion, wanting a better, that she must have some sewing in hand which she was compelled to finish; but, that Mark's illness was detaining her, she believed not. Still, she could not comprehend it. Ann had always been so eager to oblige, so simple, so open-minded. Had sewing really detained her, she

would have brought it out to show Nora; she would have told the truth, not have laid the excuse to her father's state of health. Nora was puzzled, and that was a thing she hated. Ruminating upon all this as she walked along, she met Mrs. Chattaway. Nora, who, when suffering under a personal grievance, must dilate upon it to every one, favoured Mrs. Chattaway with an account of Ann Canham, her extraordinary conduct, and her ingratitude.

"Rely upon it, her father is ill," was the answer of Mrs. Chattaway. "I will tell you why I think so, Nora. Yesterday I was at Barmester with my sister, and as we pulled up at the chemist's where I had business, Ann Canham came out with a bottle of medicine in her hand. I asked her who was ill, and she said it was her father. I remarked to the chemist afterwards that I supposed Mark Canham had a fresh attack of rheumatism, but he replied that it was fever."

"Fever!" echoed Nora.

"I exclaimed as you do: but the chemist persisted that, by Ann Canham's account, Mark must be suffering from a species of low fever. As we returned, my sister stopped the pony-carriage at the lodge, and Ann came out to us. She explained it differently from the chemist. What she had meant to imply when she went for the medicine was, that her father was feverish—but he was better then, she said. Altogether, I judge that he is a little worse than usual, and it may be that she was afraid to leave him to-day."

"Well," said Nora, "all I can say is, that I saw old Canham stealing out of the room when I knocked at it, just as though he did not want to be seen. He was smoking, too. I can't make it out."

Mrs. Chattaway was neither so speculative nor so curious as Nora; perhaps not so keen: she viewed it as nothing extraordinary that Mark Canham should be rather worse than usual, or that his daughter should decline to go out and leave him.

Much later in the day—in fact, when the afternoon was getting on—Ann Canham, with a wild, scared look in her face, turned out of the lodge. She took the road towards Trevlyn Farm. Not in an open, bold manner, as folks do who are not afraid of dogs and policemen, but in a timorous, uncertain, hesitating fashion, that did give the idea that she must dread either the one or the other. Plunging into the fields when she was nearing the farm, she stole along under cover of the hedge, until she reached the one which skirted the fold-yard. Cautiously

raising her face to take a view over it of what might be on the other side, it came almost into contact with another face, which was raised to see anything that might be seen on this—the face of Policeman Dumps.

Ann Canham uttered a shrill scream, and flew away as fast as her legs could carry her. Perhaps of all living beings, Mr. Dumps was about the last she would have preferred to encounter just then. That gentleman made his way to a side-gate, and called after her.

"What be you afeard on, Ann Canham? Did you think it was a mad bull a-looking over at you?"

It occurred to Ann Canham that her starting away in that extraordinary fashion could only be regarded as consistent with the approach of a mad bull, or some other obnoxious animal, and that the policeman might be for setting himself to the work of discovering her motive—for it lay in the nature of a policeman's work to do so. That thought, or some other, made her turn slowly back again, and confront Mr. Dumps.

"What was you afeard on?" he repeated.

"Not of nothing in particular, please, sir," she answered. "It was the suddenness like of seeing a face there that startled me."

Mr. Dumps thought she looked curiously startled still. But that complacent official, being accustomed by the bare fact of his presence to strike terror to the hearts of boys and other parish scapegraces, did not give it a second thought. "Were you looking for anybody?" he asked, simply as an idle question.

"No, sir. I just put my head over the hedge without meaning. I didn't want nothing."

Mr. Dumps, in the lofty manner affected by some of his tribe, turned on his heel without condescending so much as a "good afternoon." Ann Canham pursued her way along the hedge which skirted the fold-yard. Any one observing her closely might have detected indications of trembling about her still. In a cautious and timid manner, she at length turned her head, to obtain a glimpse of Mr. Dumps's movements.

Mr. Dumps—and what had taken him into the fold-yard at Mr. Ryle's, Ann Canham could not guess, unless it might be that he was looking after Nanny—had turned into the road, and was pursuing his way slowly down it. Every step carried him farther from her; and when he was fairly out of sight, the sigh of relief she gave was long and deep.

But of course there was no certainty that he would not be coming back again. Possibly it was that insecurity that caused Ann to take stolen looks into the fold-yard, and then duck her head under the hedge, as if she had been at some forbidden play. But Mr. Dumps did not come back again; and yet she continued her game.

A full hour by the sun had she been at it; and by her countenance, by the occasional almost despairing movement of her hands, it might be inferred that she was growing sadly anxious and weary; when Jim Sanders emerged from one of the outbuildings at the upper end of the fold-yard, and began to traverse it towards the other end. To do this he had to pass within a few yards of the hedge where the by-play was going on; and somewhat to his surprise he heard himself called to in covert tones. Casting his eyes to the spot whence the voice proceeded, he saw the well-tanned straw bonnet, the care-worn brow and weak eyes of Ann Canham above the hedge. She beckoned to him in a mysterious manner, and then all signs of her disappeared.

"If ever I see the like o' that!" soliloquized Jim. "What's up with Ann Canham?" He approached the hedge, and bawled out to know what she wanted.

"Hush—sh—sh—sh!" came forth the warning sound from the other side. "Come round here to me, Jim."

Considerably astonished, thinking perhaps Ann Canham had a litter of live puppies to show him—for, if Jim had a weakness for anything on earth, it was for those charming specimens of the young animal world—he made his way through the gate round to Ann Canham. Ann had no puppies; nothing but a small note in her hand, wafered and pressed with a thimble.

"Is the master anywhere about, Jim?"

"He's just gone into the barn now. The men be thrashing,"

Ann Canham paused a moment. Jim stared at her.

"Could you just do me a bit o' service, Jim?" she resumed.

Jim, a good-natured lad at all times, replied that he supposed he could if he tried. But he stared still; he was puzzled by this extraordinary behaviour on the part of quiet Ann Canham.

"I want this bit of a letter give to him," she said, pointing to what she held. "I want it give to him when he's by hisself like, so that it don't get seen as it's give to him. Could you manage it, Jim?"

"I dare say I could," replied Jim "What is the letter? What's inside of him?"

"Well, it concerns Mr. Ryle," said Ann Canham, after a perceptible hesitation. "Jim, if you'll do this faithful for me, I won't forget it. Mind you watch your opportunity; and keep the letter inside your smock-frock, for fear anybody should see it."

"I'll do it," said Jim. He took the note from her, put it in his trousers pocket underneath his smock-frock, and went back towards the barn whistling. Ann turned homewards, flying over the ground now as if she were running a race.

Jim had not to wait for an opportunity. He met his master coming out of the barn. The doorway was dark; the thrashing men were at the upper end of the barn, and no eyes were near. Jim could not help some of the mystery which had appeared in Ann Canham's manner from extending to his own.

"What's this?" asked George.

"Ann Canham brought it, sir. She was hiding t'other side the hedge and called to me, and she telled me to be sure to give it when nobody was by."

George took the missive to the door and looked at it. A piece of white paper, which had apparently served to wrap tea in, or something of that sort, awkwardly folded, and wafered down with a thimble. No direction.

He opened it; the wafer was not yet dry; and he saw a few words in a sprawling hand:

"Don't betray me, George. Come to me in secret as soon as you can. I think I am dying."

And in spite of its being without signature; in spite of the scrawled characters, the blotted words, George Ryle recognized the handwriting of Rupert Trevlyn.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SURPRISE FOR GEORGE RYLE.

On the hard flock bed in the upper back room at the lodge, he lay. As George Ryle stood there bending over him, he could have touched any part of the walls around. The explanation of Jim Sanders that it was Ann Canham who had brought the note, guided George naturally to the lodge; otherwise he

would not have known where to look for him. One single question to old Canham as he entered—"Is he here?"—and George bounded up the stairs.

Ann Canham, who was standing over the bed—her head just escaped the low ceiling—turned to George. Trouble and pain were on her countenance as she spoke to him.

"He is in delirium now, sir. I was afeard he would be."

George Ryle was too astonished to make any reply. Never had he cast a shade of suspicion to Rupert's being concealed at the lodge. "Has he been here long?" he whispered.

"All along, sir, since the night he was missed," was the reply of Ann Canham. "After I had got home that night, a quarter-of-an-hour it might be, and I was telling father about Master Rupert's having took the half-loaf in his hunger, he come knocking at the door to be let in. Chattaway and him had met and quarrelled, he told me, and he was knocked down, and his shoulder was hurt, and he felt tired and sick; and he said he'd stop with us till morning, and be away afore daylight, so that we should not get into trouble for sheltering him. He got me to lend him my pen and ink, and he wrote a letter to that there foreign gentleman, Mr. Daw. After that, with a dreadful deal of pressing, sir, I got him to come up to this here bed, and I lay on the settle downstairs for the night. Afore daylight I was up, and had the fire alight, and the kettle on, to make him a cup o' tea afore he started, but he did not come down. I came up here and found him ill. His shoulder was stiff and painful, and he was bruised and sore all over, and he thought he couldn't get out o' bed. Well, sir, he stopped, and he have been here ever since, getting worse, and me just frightened out of my life, for fear he should be found by Mr. Chattaway or them police, and took off to prison. I was sick for the whole day after, sir, that time that Mr. Bowen called me into his station-house and set on to question me."

George was occupied looking at Rupert. There could not be a doubt that he was in a state of partial delirium. George feared there could not be a doubt that he was in a state of danger. The bed was low and narrow, evidently hard, the flock of the mattress collected into lumps; the bolster small and almost as low as the bed. Rupert's head lay on it quietly enough; his hair, which had grown very long since his confinement, fell around him in a wavy mass; his cheeks wore the hectic of fever, his blue eyes were unnaturally bright. There was no speculation in those eyes. They were partially closed,

and though the entrance of George caused them to be turned to him, there was no recognition in their light. His arms were flung outside the bed, the wristbands pushed up as if from heat.

"I have put him on a shirt o' father's, sir, when his have wanted washing," explained Ann Canham, to whom it was natural to relate minute details. "Things needs to be shifted oftener when one's abed nor when one's up."

"How long has he been without consciousness?" inquired George.

"Just about for the last hour, sir. He writ that letter that I brought to you, and when I come back he was like this. Maybe he'll come to himself again presently; he have been as bad as this at times in the last day or two. I'm so afeard of its going on to brain-fever. If he should get into a state of raving, we could never keep his being here a secret; he'd be heard outside."

"He ought to have had a doctor to him before this."

"But how is one to be got here?" debated Ann Canham. "Once a doctor knew where Mr. Rupert was, he might be for betraying it—there's the reward, you know, sir. And how could we get a doctor in without its being known at the Hold? What mightn't Chattaway suspect?"

George remained silent, revolving what she said. There were difficulties undoubtedly in the way.

"Nobody knows the trouble I've been in, sir, especially since he got worse. At first, he just lie here quiet, more as if he was glad of the rest, and my chief care was to keep folks as far as I could out o' the lodge, bathe his shoulder, and bring him up a share of our poor meals. But since he got worse, and the fever came upon him, I've been half dazed, wondering what I ought to do, There were two people I thought I might speak to—you, sir, and Madam. But Mr. Rupert he was again it, and father he was dead again it. They were afraid, you see, that if only one was told, it might come to be known that he was here. Father, he's old now, and a'most helpless; he couldn't do a stroke towards getting his own living. If I be out afore daylight at any of my places o' work, it's as much as he can do to open the gate and fasten it back: and he knows that Mr. Chattaway would turn us from this, right off the estate, if it come to be known that we had sheltered Mr. Rupert. But yesterday Mr. Rupert found he was getting worse and worse, and I said to father what would become of us if he should die?

And they both said that you should be told to-day if he was no better. We did think him a trifle better this morning, but later the fever came on worse, and Mr. Rupert himself said he'd write a word to you, and I found a bit o' paper and brought him the big Bible, and held it afore him in bed, that he might lean the letter on while he writed it."

She ceased. George, as before, was looking at Rupert. It seemed to Ann Canham that he could not gaze sufficiently, but in truth he was buried in thought; fairly puzzled with the difficulties that encompassed the case.

"Is it anything more than low fever?" he asked.

"I don't think it is, sir, yet. But it may go on to more, you know."

George did know. He knew that assistance was necessary in more ways than one, if that worse contingency was to be avoided. Medical attendance, a more airy room, generous nourishment; and how was even one of them to be accomplished, let alone all? The close closet—it could scarcely be called more—had no chimney in it; the air and light could come in only through a small pane ingeniously made to rise at will in the roof. The narrow bed and one chair took up almost all the space, leaving very little for George and Ann Canham as they stood. George, coming in from the fresh air, felt half stifled, sick with the closeness of the room: and this must be most dangerous for the invalid. It is a mercy that these inconveniences are so soothed to those who have to endure them—as are most inconveniences and trials in life. To an outsider they look formidable, unbearable; but to the actual sufferers they are light. George Ryle felt as if a day in that atmosphere would half kill him; but Rupert, lying in it always, was sensible of no inconvenience from it. It was not, however, the less injurious to him; and it appeared that there was no remedy; there could be no removal from it.

"What have you given him?" inquired George.

"I have made him some herb tea, sir, but it didn't seem to do him good, and then I went over to Barmester to the druggist's and got a bottle o' physic. I had to say it was for father, and the druggist told me I ought to call in a doctor, when I described the illness. Coming out of the shop there was Miss Diana's pony-carriage at the door, and Madam met me and asked who the physic was for: I never was so took aback. And the physic didn't seem to do him good neither."

"I meant as to food," returned George.

"Ah! sir, as to food—what could I give him but our poor fare? milk porridge and such like. I went up to the Hold one day and begged a basin o' curds-and-whey, and he eat it all and drank up the whey quite greedy: but I didn't dare go again, for fear of their suspecting something. It's meat and wine that he ought to have had from the first, sir, but we can't get such things as that. Why, sir, I shouldn't dare to be seen cooking a bit o' meat: it would set Mr. Chattaway wondering at once. What's to be done?"

What, indeed? There was the question. Idea after idea shot through George Ryle's mind; wild fancies, because, under the present fears, impossible to be acted upon. It might be dangerous to call in a doctor. Allowing that he, the man of medicine, proved true, and kept the secret, the very fact of his attendance there would cause a stir at the Hold. Miss Diana would come down, questioning old Canham of his ailments; and she would inevitably find that he was *not* ill enough to require a doctor. A doctor might venture there once: but regularly? George did not see the way by any means clear.

But Rupert must not be left there to die. George took up his delicate hand—and Rupert's hands had always been delicate—and held it as he spoke to him. It was hot; fevered: the dry lips were fevered; the hectic cheeks, the white brow, all were burning with fever. "Don't you know me, Rupert?" he bent lower to ask.

The words were so far heard that Rupert moved his head from side to side on the bolster; perhaps the familiar name "Rupert" may have penetrated some chord of memory; but there was no real recognition, and he began to twitch at the bed-clothes with one of his hands.

George turned away. He went down the almost upright ladder of a staircase, feeling that little time was to be lost. Old Canham stood in his tottering fashion, leaning upon his crutch, watching the descent.

"What do you think of him, Mr. George?"

"I hardly know what to think, Mark. Or rather, I know what to think, but I don't know what to do. It seems to me that a doctor must be got here; and without loss of time."

Old Canham—who had sat down, for he was incapable of standing long—lifted his hands with a gesture of despair. "Once the secret is give over to a doctor, sir, there's no telling where it'll travel to, or what'll be the consequence to us all."

"I think King would be true," said George. "Nay, I feel

sure he would be true. The worst is, he's a simple-minded man, and might betray it through sheer inadvertency. I would a great deal rather bring Mr. Benage to him; I *know* we might rely on Benage, and he is more skilful than King; but it is not practicable. To see one of the renowned Barmester surgeons entering the lodge in attendance on you—for that's what it must be put upon, whoever comes—might create greater commotion at the Hold than would be desirable: they would be for asking what malady Mark Canham was attacked with, to render necessary so out-of-the-way a proceeding; would come flocking, one and all, with their questions. No, it must be King."

"Sir, couldn't you go to one o' them gentlemen yourself and describe what's the matter with Master Rupert, and ask for some medicine? You needn't say who it is that's ill."

George shook his head. "It would not do, Mark; the responsibility is too great. Were anything to happen to Rupert—and I believe he is in danger—you and I should alike blame ourselves for not having called in advice to him at all risks. I shall get King here somehow."

He went out as he spoke, partly perhaps to avoid further opposition to what he felt *must* be done. Yet he did not see the besetting difficulties the less, and he halted in thought outside the lodge door.

At that moment, Maude Trevlyn came in view. She was alone, walking slowly down the avenue. George advanced to meet her; he could not help noticing her listless step, her pale, weary face.

"Maude, what are you grieving at?"

That she had been grieving, and recently, her eyes betrayed, and the words renewed it. Struggling for a brief moment, and unsuccessfully, with her feelings, she gave way with a burst of tears, and sobbed herself almost into hysterics.

George was startled. He drew her into the trees. "Maude, Maude, you will be ill. What is this?"

"Oh, this suspense!—this agony!" she breathed. "Every day, almost every hour, something or other occurs to vividly renew the trouble. If it could only end! George, I cannot bear it much longer. I feel as if I must go off to the ends of the world and search for him. If I were only sure he was in life, it would be something."

George took rapid counsel with himself. Surely Maude would be safe; surely it would be a charity, nay, a duty, to tell

her! He drew her hand in his, he bent his face—almost as hectic with excitement as the unhappy Rupert's, hard by, was with fever—near to hers.

"Maude! what will you give me for the news that I have heard? I can give you tidings of Rupert. He is not dead! He is not very far away!"

For an instant her heart stood still. But George glanced round as with fear, and there was a sadness in his tone.

"He is taken!" she exclaimed, her pulses bounding on.

"No. But care must be observed if we would prevent it. He is, in that sense, at liberty, and very near to us. But it is not all sunshine, Maude; he is exceedingly ill."

"Where is he?" she gasped.

"Will you compose yourself if I take you to him? But we have need of great caution; we must make sure that no prying eyes are spying at us."

Her very agitation proved how great had been the strain upon her nervous system; for a few minutes he thought she would faint, there, leaning against the trees as she stood. "Only take me to him, George," she murmured. "I will bless you for ever."

Into the lodge and up old Canham's narrow and perpendicular staircase he led her. She entered the room timidly, not with the eager bound of hope fulfilled, but with slow and hesitating steps, almost as she had once entered into the presence of the dead, that long ago night at Trevlyn Farm.

He lay as he had lain when George went out: the eyes fixed, the head beginning to turn restlessly, the one hand picking at the coarse brown sheet. "Come in, Maude; there is nothing to fear; but he will not know you."

She went in with her trembling hands, her changing cheeks. She stood for a moment gazing at him who lay there, as though it required time to take in the scene; and then she fell on her knees in a strange burst, half joy, half grief, and kissed his hands, and his fevered lips.

"Oh, Rupert, my brother! My brother Rupert."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DANGER.

THE residence of the surgeon, Mr. King, was situated on the road to Barbrook, not far from the parsonage. It was a small, square, red-brick house, only two storeys high, with a great bronze knocker on the door, which was particularly narrow and modest. If you wanted to enter, you could either raise this knocker, which would most likely bring forth Mr. King himself in answer; or, ignoring ceremony—for ceremony was not much in fashion in that remote locality—you could turn the handle and walk in of your own accord, as George Ryle did, and admitted himself into the strip of a passage. On the right was the parlour, quite a fashionable room, with a tiger-skin stretched out by way of hearth-rug; on the left was a small apartment fitted up with bottles and pill-boxes, where Mr. King saw his patients. One sat there as George Ryle entered, and the surgeon turned round, as he poured some liquid from what looked like a jelly-glass with a spout, into a half-pint green glass bottle.

Now, of all the disagreeable *contretemps* that could have occurred, to meet that particular patient George felt to be about the worst. Ann Canham had not been more confounded at the sight of Policeman Dumps's head over the hedge, than George was at Policeman Dumps himself—for it was no other than that troublesome officer who sat in the patient's chair, the late afternoon's sun streaming on his head. George's active mind hit on a ready excuse for his own visit.

"Is my mother's medicine ready, Mr. King?"

"The medicine ready! Why, I sent it three good hours ago!"

"Did you? I understood them to say—— But there's no harm done; I was coming down this way. What a nice warm afternoon it is!" he exclaimed, throwing himself on a chair as if he would take a little rest. "Have you been having a tooth drawn, Dumps?"

"No, sir, but I've got the face-ache awful," was the reply of the policeman, who was holding a handkerchief to his right cheek. "It's what they call tic-douloureux, I fancy, for it comes on by

fits and starts. I be out of sorts altogether, and I thought I'd ask Doctor King to make me up a bottle of physic."

So the physic was for Dumps. Mr. King seemed a long time over it, measuring this liquid, measuring that, shaking it all up together, and gossiping the while. George, in his impatience, thought it was never coming to an end. Dumps seemed to be in no hurry to go, Mr. King in no hurry to dismiss him. They talked over half the news of the parish. They spoke of Rupert Trevlyn and his prolonged absence, and Mr. Dumps gave it as his opinion that "if he warn't in hiding somewhere, he were gone for good." Whether Mr. Dumps meant gone to some foreign terrestrial country, or into a celestial, he did not particularize. But George liked not the tone given to the words "in hiding;" he fancied it too significant a one.

Utterly out of patience he rose and left the room, standing outside against the door-post, as if he would watch the passers-by. Perhaps the movement imparted an impetus to Mr. Dumps, for he also rose and took his bottle of medicine from the hands of the surgeon. But he lingered yet: and George thought he *never was* coming forth.

That desirable consummation did arrive at last. The policeman departed, and paced away on his beat with his official tread. George returned indoors.

"I fancied you were waiting to see me," observed Mr. King. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not with me. I want to put you upon your honour, doctor," continued George, a momentary smile crossing his lips. And it may as well be remarked, for the benefit of hypercritics, that the salutation "doctor" was universally used in Barbrook to Mr. King, as it is in many rural districts to general practitioners. The poor used it, believing it to be his proper title; the rich, from familiar custom.

"To put me upon my honour!" echoed the surgeon, staring at George.

"I wish to let you into a secret; but you must give me your word of honour that you will be a true man, and not betray it. In short, I want to enlist your sympathies, your kindly nature, heartily in the cause."

"I suppose some of the poor have got into trouble?" cried Mr. King, not very well knowing what to make of the words.

"No," said George. "Let me put a case to you. One who is under the ban of the law and of his fellow-men, whom a word

from them could betray to years of punishment—this one is lying in sore need of medical skill; if he cannot obtain it he may soon be past its aid. Will you be the good Samaritan, and give it; and faithfully keep the secret?"

Mr. King regarded George attentively, slowly rubbing his bald head: he was a man of six-and-sixty now. "Are you speaking," he asked, "of Rupert Trevlyn?"

George paused, perhaps rather taken aback; but the surgeon's face was a kindly one, its expression benevolent. "What if I were? Would you be true to *him?*"

"Yes, I would: and I am surprised that you thought it needful to ask. George, were the greatest criminal on earth lying in secret, and wanting my aid as a doctor, I would give it and be silent. I go as a healing man; I don't go as a policeman. Were a doctor, taken to a patient under such circumstances, to betray trust, I should consider that he had violated his duty. Medical men are not informers."

"I felt that we might trust you," said George. "It is Rupert Trevlyn. He took refuge that night at old Canham's, it seems, and has been ill ever since, growing worse and worse. But they fear danger now, and thought fit this afternoon to send for me. Rupert scrawled a few lines himself, but before I could get there he was delirious."

"Is it fever?"

"Low fever, Ann Canham says. It may go on to worse, you know, doctor."

Mr. King nodded his head. "Where can they have concealed him at Canham's? There's no place for it."

"He is upstairs in a bed-closet. The most stifling hole! I felt ill whilst I stayed there. It is a perplexing affair altogether. That place of itself is enough to kill any one in a fever, and there's no chance of removing him from it. There's hardly a chance of getting you in to see him: it must be accomplished in the most cautious manner. Were Chattaway to see you going in, who knows what it might lead to? If he should, by ill luck, see you," added George, after a pause, "your visit is to old Canham, remember."

Mr. King gave his head its short, emphatic nod; his frequent substitute for an answer. "Rupert Trevlyn at Canham's!" he exclaimed. "Well, you have surprised me!"

"I cannot tell you how I was surprised," returned George. "But we had better be going; I fear he is in danger."

"Ay. Delirious, you say?"

"I think so. He was quiet, but he evidently did not know me. He did not know Maude; I met her as I was leaving the lodge, and thought it only kind to tell her of the discovery. It has been a most anxious time for her."

"There's another that it's an anxious time for; and that's Madam Chattaway," remarked the surgeon. "I was called in to see her a few days ago. But I can do nothing for her: the malady is on the mind. Now I am ready."

He had been putting one or two papers in his pocket, probably containing some cooling powder or other remedy for Rupert. George walked with him: he wished to go in with him if it could be managed; he was very anxious to hear his opinion of Rupert. They pursued their way unmolested, meeting no one of more consequence than Mr. Dumps, who appeared to be occupied in nursing his cheek.

"So far so good," cried George, as they came in sight of the lodge. "But now comes the tug of war. my walking with you, if seen, is nothing; but to be seen entering the lodge with you might be a great deal. There seems no one about."

Ah! unlucky chance! By some untoward fatality the master of Trevlyn Hold emerged in sight, coming quickly down the avenue, at the moment that Mr. King had his feet on the lodge steps to enter. George suppressed a groan of irritation

"There's no help for it, doctor: you must have your wits about you," he whispered. "*I* shall go straight on as if I had come to pay a visit to the Hold."

Mr. King was not perhaps the best of men to "have his wits about him" on a sudden emergency, and almost as the last breathed word left George's lips, Mr. Chattaway was upon them.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Chattaway," said George. "Is Cris at home?"

George continued his way as he spoke, brushing past Mr. Chattaway without stopping You know what a very coward is self-consciousness. The presence of Chattaway at that ill-omened moment set them all inwardly trembling. George, the surgeon, old Canham sitting inside, and Ann peeping from the corner of the window, felt one and all as if Chattaway must divine some part of the great secret locked within their breasts.

"Cris? I don't think Cris is at home," called out Mr. Chattaway to George. "He went out after dinner."

"I am going to see," replied George, looking back to speak.

The little delay had given the doctor time to collect himself,

and he strove to look and speak as much at ease as possible. He stood on the lodge step, waiting to greet Mr. Chattaway. It would never do for him to make believe he was not going into the lodge, as George did, for Mr. Chattaway had seen him step up to it.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Chattaway? Fine weather this!"

"We shall have a change before long; the glass is shifting. Anybody ill here?" continued Mr. Chattaway.

"Not they, I hope!" returned the surgeon with a laugh. "I give old Canham a look in now and then, when I am passing and can spare the time, just for a dish of gossip and to ask after his rheumatism. I suppose you thought I had quite forgotten you," he added, turning to the old man, who had risen now, and stood leaning on his crutch, looking, if Mr. Chattaway could but have understood it, half frightened to death. "It's a long while since I was here, Mark."

He sat down on the settle as he spoke, as if to intimate that he intended to take a dish of gossip then. Mr. Chattaway—ah! can he suspect? thought old Mark as he entered the lodge; a thing he did not do once in a year. Conscience does make cowards of us—and it need not be altogether a guilty conscience to do this—and it was rendering Ann Canham as one paralyzed. She would have given the whole world to leave the room and go up to Rupert, and guard, so far as her presence could guard, against any noise he might make; but she feared the construction that might be put upon it, the suspicion it might excite. Foolish fears! Had Rupert not been there, Ann Canham would have passed in and out of the room unrestrainedly, without fearing its conveying any suspicion to Mr. Chattaway.

"Madam Chattaway said you were ill, I remember," said he to Mark Canham. "Fever, I understood. She said something about seeing your fever mixture at the chemist's at Barmester."

Ann Canham turned hot and cold. She did not dare to even glance at her father, still less could she prompt him; but it so happened that she, willing to spare him unnecessary worry, had not mentioned the little episode of meeting Mrs. Chattaway at Barmester. Old Mark was cautious, however.

"Yes, Squire. I've had a deal o' fever lately, on and off. Perhaps Doctor King could give me some'at for't, better nor them druggists gives."

"Perhaps I can," said Mr. King. "I'll have a talk with you presently. How is Madam to-day, Mr. Chattaway?"

"She's as well as usual, except for grumbling," was the ungracious answer. And the master of Trevlyn Hold, perhaps not finding it particularly lively there, went out as he delivered it, giving a short adieu to Mr. King.

Meanwhile, George Ryle reached the Hold. Maude saw his approach from the drawing-room window, and came herself to the hall-door and opened it. "I wish to speak to you," she softly whispered.

He followed her into the room; there was no one in it. Maude closed the door, and spoke in a gentle whisper.

"May I dare to tell Aunt Edith?"

George looked dubious. "That is a serious question, Maude."

"It would raise her, as may be said, to renewed life," returned Maude, her tone one of impassioned earnestness. "George, if this suspense is to continue, she will sink under it. It was very, very bad for me to bear, and I am young and strong; and I fear my aunt gets the dreadful doubt upon her now and then whether—whether—that is not true that was said of Mr. Chattaway; whether Rupert was not killed that night. Oh, George, let me tell her!"

"Maude, I should be as pleased for her to know it as you. My only doubt is, whether she would *dare* to keep the secret from her husband, Rupert being actually within the precincts of the Hold."

"She can be stronger in Rupert's cause than you deem. I am sure that she will be safe as you—as I."

"Then let us tell her, Maude."

Maude's eyes grew bright with satisfaction. Taking all circumstances into view, there was not much cause for congratulation; but, compared with what had been, it seemed as joy to Maude, and her heart was light. The young are ever sanguine; illness wears not a dangerous aspect to them, and this of Rupert's brought to her little fear.

"I shall never repay you, George," she cried, with enthusiasm, lifting her eyes gratefully to his. "I shall never repay you for allowing me to tell my poor aunt Edith."

George laughed, and made a sudden prisoner of her. "I can repay myself, now, Maude."

And Mrs. Chattaway was told.

In the dusk of that same evening, when the skies were grey to darkness, and the trees on either side the lonely avenue were damp and gloomy, there glided one by them with timid and

cautious step. It was Mrs. Chattaway. A soft black shawl was thrown over her head and shoulders, and her gown was black; good precautions, rendering her less easy to be observed; and curious eyes might be about. She kept close to the trees as she stole along, ready to conceal herself amidst them if necessary.

And it was necessary. Surely there was a fatality clinging to that spot this evening, or else Mr. Chattaway was haunting it, perhaps in suspicion. One moment more, and he would have met his wife; but she heard the footsteps in time.

Her heart beating, her hands pressed upon her bosom, she waited in her dark hiding-place until he had gone past. She waited until she believed he was in safety in the Hold, and then she went on.

The shutters were closed at the lodge, and Mrs. Chattaway knocked softly at them. Alas! alas! I tell you there was certainly some untoward fate in the ascendant. In the very act of doing so she was surprised by Cris. He was running in at the gate.

"Goodness, mother! who was to know you in that guise? Why, what on earth are you shaking at?"

"You have startled me, Cris. I did not know *you;* I thought it some strange man running in upon me."

"What are you doing down here?"

Ah! what was she doing? What was she to say? what excuse to make? She choked down her throbbing breath, and strove to speak plausibly.

"Poor old Canham has been so ailing, Cris. I must just step in to see him."

Cris tossed his head in scorn. To make friendly visits to sick old men was not in *his* line. "I'm sure I should not trouble myself about that old Canham if I were you, mother," cried he.

He ran on as he spoke, but had not gone many steps when he found his mother's arm gently laid on his.

"Cris, dear, oblige me by not saying anything of this at home. Your papa has prejudices, you know; he thinks as you do; and perhaps he would be angry with me for coming. But I like to visit those who are ill, to say a kind word to them; perhaps because I am so often ill myself."

"I shan't bother myself to say anything about it," was Cris's ungracious response. "I'm sure you are welcome to go, mother, if it affords you any pleasure. Ugh! fine fun it must

be to sit with that rheumatic old Canham! But as to his being ill, he is not—if you mean worse than usual: I have seen him about to-day."

Cris finally went off, and Mrs. Chattaway returned to the door, which was gingerly opened about an inch by Ann Canham. "Let me in, Ann! let me in!"

She did not wait, she pushed her way in; and Ann Canham, all in a tremor, shut and bolted the door. Ann Canham's tactics were uncertain: she was not aware whether or not it was known to Mrs. Chattaway. That lady's first words enlightened her, spoken as they were in the lowest whisper.

"Is he better to-night? What does Mr. King say?"

Ann Canham lifted her hands in an access of trouble. "He's not better, Madam; he seems worse. And Mr. King said it would be necessary that he should visit him once or twice a day: and how can he dare venture? It passed off very well his saying this afternoon that he just called in in passing to see old father; but he couldn't make that excuse to Mr. Chattaway a second time."

"To Mr. Chattaway!" she quickly repeated. "Did Mr. Chattaway see Mr. King here?"

"Worse luck, and he did, Madam. He came in with him."

A fear that almost seemed ominous arose to the heart of Mrs. Chattaway. "If we could only get him from here to a safe distance!" she exclaimed. "There would be less danger then."

But it could not be. Rupert was too ill to be moved. Mrs. Chattaway was turning to the stairs, when a gentle knocking was heard at the outer door.

It was only Mr. King. Mrs. Chattaway eagerly accosted him with the one anxious question—was Rupert in danger?

"Well, I hope not: not in actual danger," was the surgeon's answer. "But—you see—circumstances are against him."

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly, not precisely understanding to what circumstances he alluded. Mr. King resumed.

"Nothing is more essential in these cases of low fever than plenty of fresh air and generous nourishment. The one he cannot get, lying where he does; to obtain the other may be almost as difficult. If these low fevers cannot be checked, they go on very often to—to——"

"To what?" she rejoined, a terrible dread upon her that he meant to say, "to death."

"To typhus," quietly remarked the surgeon.

"Oh, but that is dangerous!" she cried, clasping her hands. "*That* sometimes goes on to death."

"Yes," said Mr. King; and it struck her that his tone was significant.

"But you must try and prevent it, doctor—you must prevent it, and save him," she cried; and her imploring accent, her trembling hands, proved to the surgeon how great was her emotion.

He shook his head: the issues of life and death were not in his power. "My dear lady, I will do what I am enabled to do; more, I cannot. We poor human doctors can only work under the hand of God."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A RED-LETTER DAY AT TREVLYN FARM.

THERE are some happy days in the most monotonous, the least favoured life; periods on which we can look back always, even to the life's end, and say, "That was a red-letter day!"

Such a day had arisen for Trevlyn Farm. Perhaps never, since the unhappy accident which had carried away its master, had so joyful a one dawned for Mrs. Ryle and George—certainly never one that brought half the satisfaction; for George Ryle was going up to the Hold that day to clear off the last instalment of the debt to Mr. Chattaway.

It was the lifting of a heavy tax; the removal of a cruel nightmare—a nightmare that had borne them down, that had all but crushed them with its cruel weight. How they had toiled, and striven, and persevered, and saved, George and Nora alone knew. They knew it far better than Mrs. Ryle; she had joined in the saving, but very little in the work. To Mrs. Ryle the debt seemed to have been cleared off quickly—far more quickly than had appeared likely at the time of Mr. Ryle's death. And so it had been. George Ryle was one of those happy people who believe in the special interposition and favour of God; and he believed that God had shown favour to him, and helped him with prosperity. It could not be denied that Trevlyn Farm had been favoured with remarkable prosperity since George's reign at it. Season after

season, when other people complained of short returns, those of Trevlyn Farm had flourished. Harvests had been abundant; crops had been abundant; cattle, sheep, poultry—all had been richly abundant. It is true that George brought keen intelligence, ever-watchful care to bear upon it; but returns, even with these, are not always satisfactory. They had been so with him in an eminent degree. His bargains in the buying and selling of stock had been always good, yielding him a profit—for he had entered into them somewhat largely—that had never been dreamt of by his father. The farmers around, seeing how all he put his hand to seemed to flourish, set it down to his superior skill, and talked one to another, at their gatherings at fairs and markets, of "young Ryle's 'cuteness." Perhaps the success might be owing to a very different cause, as George believed—and nothing could have shaken that belief—the special blessing of Heaven!

Yes, in spite of Mr. Chattaway's oppression, they had flourished. It had seemed to that gentleman like magic how they had kept up and increased the payments to him, in addition to their other expenses. That the debt should be ready to be finally cancelled he scarcely believed, although he had received intimation to that effect.

It did not please him. No; dear as money was to the master of Trevlyn Hold, he had been better pleased to keep George Ryle still under his thumb, unemancipated. *He* had not been favoured with the like success: his corn had, some seasons, been thin in the ear; his live stock had been unhealthy; his bargains had turned out losses instead of gains; he had made bad debts; his coal-mine had exploded; his ricks had been burnt. Certainly no extraordinary luck had followed Mr. Chattaway—rather the contrary; and he regarded George Ryle with anger and envy; a great deal more than would have pleased George, had he known it. Not that George cared, in the abstract, whether he had Mr. Chattaway's anger or love; but George wanted to stand so far well with him as to get the lease of his best farm. A difficult task! You'll never do it, George Ryle!

Mr. Chattaway sat in what was called the steward's room that fine autumn morning—but autumn was merging into winter now. When rents were paid to him, it was here he sat to receive them. It was where the steward, in the old days of Squire Trevlyn, sat to receive them; to see the tenants and workpeople upon other matters; to transact business generally

—for it was not until the advent of Mr. Chattaway that Trevlyn Hold had been without its steward or bailiff. In the estimation of Miss Diana, it ought not to be without one now.

Mr. Chattaway was not in a good humour that morning—which is not saying much: but he was in an unusually bad one. A man who rented a small farm of fifty acres under him had come in to pay his annual rent. That is, he had paid part of it, pleading unavoidable misfortune for not being able to make up the remainder, and begging time and grace. It did not please Mr. Chattaway—never a more exacting man than he with his tenants—and the unhappy defaulter wound up the displeasure to a climax by inquiring, innocently and simply, really not meaning any offence, whether any news of the poor young Squire had come to light.

Mr. Chattaway had not done digesting the unpalatable remark when George entered. "Good morning, Mr. Chattaway," was his greeting. And perhaps of all his tenants George Ryle was the only one who did not on these occasions, when they met face to face as landlord and tenant, address him by his coveted title of "Squire."

"Good morning," returned Mr. Chattaway, shortly and snappishly. "Take a seat."

George drew a chair to the table at which Mr. Chattaway sat. Opening a substantial bag, he counted out of it notes and gold, and a few shillings in silver, which he divided into two portions; then, with his hands, he pushed each nearer Mr. Chattaway, one after the other.

"This is the year's rent, Mr. Chattaway; and this, I am happy to say, is the last instalment of the debt and interest which my father owed—or was said to owe—to Squire Trevlyn. Will you be so good as to give me a receipt in full?"

Mr. Chattaway swept towards him the heap designated as the rent, apparently ignoring the other and what had been said of it. "What have you deducted from it?" he asked, in angry tones, as he counted it over, and found that it came somewhat short of the sum expected.

"Not much," replied George; "only what I have a right to deduct. The fences, and—— But I have the accounts with me," he continued, taking three or four papers from his pocket. "You can look them over."

Mr. Chattaway scrutinized the papers one by one, but he was unable to find anything to object to in the items. George Ryle knew better that to deduct money for anything that did

not fall legally to the landlord. But it was in Mr. Chattaway's nature to dispute.

"If I brought this matter of the fences into a court of law, George Ryle, I believe it would be given against you."

"I don't think you believe anything of the sort, Mr. Chattaway," returned George, good-humouredly. "If you have any great wish to try it, you can do so: but the loss would be yours."

Probably Mr. Chattaway knew that it would be. He said no more, but proceeded to count the other money. It was all there, all that remained to be paid, both principal and interest. In vain Mr. Chattaway opened his books of the days gone by, and went over old figures; he could not claim another fraction. The long-pending two thousand pounds, the disputed loan, which had caused so much heart-burning, which had led in a remote degree to Mr. Ryle's violent death, was at length paid off.

"As I have paid former sums under the same protest that my father did, so I now pay this last and final one," said George, in a civil but straightforward and business-like tone. "I believe that Squire Trevlyn cancelled the debt on his death-bed; I and my mother have lived in the belief; but there was no document to prove it, and therefore we have had to bear the consequences. It is all, however, honourably paid now."

Mr. Chattaway could not demur to this, and he gave a receipt—in full, as George expressed it—for that and for the year's rent. As George put the former safely in his pocket-book, he felt like a bird set at liberty from a long and cruel imprisonment. He was a free man and a joyous one.

"That farm of yours has turned out well of late years," observed Mr. Chattaway.

"Very well: there's the proof," pointing to the money on Mr. Chattaway's desk. "To tell you the truth, I gave myself two more years to pay it off in, and Mrs. Ryle thought it would take longer. But I have been prosperous in my bargains with stock. Will you be afraid to try me on a farm on my own account?"

Had it been any eligible body except George Ryle, Mr. Chattaway would probably have said he should not be afraid to try him; but Mr. Chattaway did not like George Ryle. He disliked him as a mean, ill-principled man will dislike and shun an honourable one.

"I should think that when you are making Trevlyn Farm

answer so well, you would be loth to leave it," remarked Mr. Chattaway, ungraciously.

"So I might be, were Trevlyn Farm leased on my own account alone. Of all the returns which have accrued from my care and labour, not a shilling has found its way to me: I have worked entirely for others. But for the heavy costs which have been upon us, the chief of which were Treve's expenses and this old debt of Squire Trevlyn's, there would have been a fair sum to put by yearly, and I imagine my mother would have allowed me to take half as my portion. I believe she intends to do so by Treve, and I hope Treve will make as good a thing of the farm as I have made."

"That's not likely," slightingly spoke Mr. Chattaway.

"He may do well if he chooses; there's no doubt about it, and he can always come to me for advice. I shall not be far away—at least, if I can settle where I hope to do. My mother wishes the lease transferred into Trevlyn's name: I suppose there will be no objection to it."

"I'll consider of it," shortly replied Mr. Chattaway.

"And now, Mr. Chattaway," George continued, with a smile, "I want you to promise me the lease of the Upland Farm. It will be vacant in spring."

"You are mad to ask it," said Mr. Chattaway. "A man without a shilling—and you have just informed me you don't possess one—can't expect to take the Upland Farm. That farm's only suitable for a gentleman"—and the master of Trevlyn Hold laid an offensive stress upon the word—"and one who has his pockets lined with money. I have had an application for the Upland Farm, which I think I shall accept. In fact, for the matter of that, I had some thought of retaining it in my own hands, and putting a bailiff to manage it."

"You had better let it to me," returned George, not losing his good-humour. "Was the application made to you by Mr. Peterby?"

Mr. Chattaway stared in surprise at his knowing so much. "What if it was?" he resentfully answered.

"Why, then, I can tell you that it will not be repeated. Mr. Peterby's client—I am not sure that I am at liberty to mention his name—has given up the idea. Partly because I have told him I want the farm myself, and he says he won't oppose me, out of respect to my father's memory; partly because Mr. Peterby has heard of another likely to suit him as well, if not

better. All the neighbours would be glad to see me take the Upland Farm."

Mr. Chattaway's breath was nearly taken away with the insolence. "Had you not better constitute yourself manager of my estate, and take possession of the Hold, and let my farms to whom you will?" he sarcastically answered. "How dare you interfere with my tenants, or with those who would become my tenants, George Ryle?"

"I have not interfered with them. This client of Mr. Peterby's happened to mention to me that he had asked that firm to make inquiries for him about the Upland Farm, and I immediately rejoined that it was the very farm I was hoping to take myself; and it seems he determined of his own goodwill not to oppose me."

"Who was it?" demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"One who would not have suited you, if you have set your mind upon the farm being tenanted by a gentleman," freely answered George. "He is an honest man, and a man whose coffers are well lined through his own industry; but he could not by any stretch of imagination be regarded as a gentleman. It is Cope the butcher—I may as well tell you. Since he retired from his shop, he finds his time hang on his hands, and has resolved to turn farmer. Mr. Chattaway, I hope you will let it to me."

"It appears to me nothing less than audacity to ask it," was the cold reply. "Pray where's your money to come from to stock it?"

"It's all ready," said George.

Mr. Chattaway looked at him, deeming the assertion to be a joke. "If you have nothing better to do with your time than to jest it away, I have with mine," was the delicate hint he gave to George.

"But the money *is* ready," continued George. "Mr. Chattaway, I do not wish to conceal anything from you: to be otherwise than quite open with you. The money to stock the Upland Farm is going to be lent to me; you will be surprised when I tell you by whom—Mr. Apperley."

The master of Trevlyn Hold was surprised; it was not much in Farmer Apperley's line to lend money. He was too cautious a man.

"It's true," said George, laughing. "He has so good an opinion of my skill as a farmer, or of the Upland Farm's capabilities, that he has offered to lend me sufficient money to enter upon it."

"I should have thought you had had enough of farming land upon borrowed money," ungenerously retorted Mr. Chattaway.

"So I have—looking at it in one point of view," was the composed answer. "But I have managed to clear off the debt, you see, and I don't doubt I shall be able to do the same by Mr. Apperley's. He proposes only a fair rate of interest; considerably less than I have been paying you."

"It is a strange thing that you, a young and single man, should raise your ambitious eyes to the Upland Farm."

"Not at all. If I don't take the Upland, I shall take some other as large. But I should have to go a greater distance, and I don't care to do that. As to my being a single man—perhaps that might be remedied if you will let me have the Upland."

He spoke with a laugh, and yet Mr. Chattaway detected somewhat of a serious meaning in his tone. He gazed hard at George. It may be that his thoughts glanced at his daughter Octave.

There was a long pause. "Are you thinking of marrying?" demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"As soon as circumstances will allow me to do so," was George's answer.

"And who is the lady?"

George shook his head; a very decisive shake, in spite of the smile on his lips. "I cannot tell you that now, Mr. Chattaway; you will know it sometime."

"I suppose I shall, if the match ever comes off," returned Mr. Chattaway, in a very cross-grained sort of manner. "If it has to wait until you rent the Upland Farm, it may wait some time."

"You will promise me the lease of it, Mr. Chattaway. You cannot think but I shall do the land justice, or be anything but a good tenant."

"I won't promise anything of the sort," doggedly answered Mr. Chattaway. "I'll promise you, if you like, that you never shall have the lease of it."

And, talk as George would, he could not get him into a more genial frame of mind. At length he rose, good-humoured, gay; as he had been throughout the interview.

"Never mind for the present, Mr. Chattaway. I shall not let you alone until you promise me the farm. There's plenty of time between now and spring."

As he was crossing the hall on his way to the door, he saw

Miss Diana Trevlyn, and stopped to shake hands with her. "You have been paying your rent, I suppose," she said.

"My rent and something else," replied George, in high spirits—and the removal of that incubus which had so long lain on him had sent them up to fever heat. "I have handed over the last instalment of the debt and interest, Miss Diana, and have the receipt safe here"—touching his breast-pocket. "I have paid it under protest, as I have always told Mr. Chattaway; for I fully believe that Squire Trevlyn cancelled it."

"If I thought that my father cancelled it, Mr. Chattaway should never have had my approbation in pressing it," severely spoke Miss Diana. "Is it true that you think of leaving Trevlyn Farm? Rumour says so."

"Quite true. It is time I began life on my own account. I have been asking Mr. Chattaway to let me have the Upland."

"The Upland! You!" There was nothing offensive in Miss Diana's exclamation: it was spoken in simple surprise.

"Why not?" said George. "I may be thinking of getting a wife; and the Upland is the only farm in the neighbourhood that I would take her to."

Miss Diana smiled in answer to his joke, as she thought it. "The house on the Upland Farm is quite a mansion," she returned, keeping up the jest. "Will no inferior one suffice her?"

"No. She is a gentlewoman born and bred, and must live as such."

"George, you speak as if you were in earnest. Are you really thinking of being married?"

"If I can get the Upland Farm. But——"

George was quite startled from the conclusion of his sentence. Over Miss Diana's shoulder, gazing at him with a strangely wild expression, was the face of Octave Chattaway, her lips apart, a crimson glow on her cheeks.

CHAPTER L.

A DILEMMA IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

About ten days elapsed, and Rupert Trevlyn, lying in concealment at the lodge, was both better and worse. A contradiction, you will say; and it does sound so. The prompt remedies applied by Mr. King had effected their object in abating the fever; it had not gone on to brain-fever or to typhus, and the tendency to delirium was stopped; so far he was better. But these dangerous symptoms had been replaced by others that might prove not less dangerous in the end: great prostration, alarming weakness, and what appeared to be a settled cough. The old tendency to consumption was showing itself more plainly than it had ever shown itself before.

He had had a cough often enough, which had come and gone again, as coughs do come to a great many of us; but the experienced ear of Mr. King detected a difference in this one. "It has a nasty sound in it," the doctor privately remarked to George Ryle. Poor Ann Canham, faint at heart lest this cough should be the means of betraying his presence, pasted up with paper all the chinks of the door, and kept it hermetically closed when any one was downstairs. Things usually go by contrary, you know; and it seemed that the lodge had never been so inundated with callers as it was now.

Two great cares were upon those cognizant of the secret: to keep Rupert's presence in the lodge from the knowledge of the outside world, and to supply him with nourishing food. Upon none did the first care—it may be more appropriate to call it fear—press so painfully as upon Rupert himself. His anxiety was incessant; his dread, lest his place of concealment should get to the knowledge of Mr. Chattaway, never ceasing. When he lay awake, his ears were on the strain for what might be happening downstairs, for who might be coming in; if he dozed—as he did several times in the course of the day—he would be haunted by dreams of pursuers, and start wildly up in bed, fancying he saw Mr. Chattaway entering the room, the police at his heels. For twenty minutes afterwards he would lie bathed in perspiration, unable to get the fright or the vision from his mind.

There was no doubt that this contributed to increase his

weakness and to keep him back. Some of you may know what those sudden attacks of perspiration are, and how they tend to make weaker the already weakened frame. By night and by day, sleeping and waking, was the never-ceasing dread of discovery upon Rupert; there was the ever-present vision of the future that must succeed that discovery—the felon's exposure and punishment. Let Rupert Trevlyn's future be what it might; let the result be the very worst, one thing was certain—the actual punishment could not be worse than this its anticipation. Imagination is more vivid than reality. He would lie and go through the whole ordeal of his future trial. He would see himself in the dock, not before the lenient magistrates of Barmester, but before one of the scarlet-robed judges of the realm; he would listen to the damnatory evidence of Mr. Chattaway, of Jim Sanders, bringing home to him the crime and all its shame; he would hear the irrevocable sentence from those grave presiding lips—that of penal servitude. Nothing could be worse for Rupert than these visions. And there was no help for them. Not all the skill that the faculty can put forth, not all the drugs known to science, can prevent the diseased vagaries of the imagination. Had Rupert been in strong bodily health, he might have been able to shake off some of these haunting fears; lying as he did in his weakness, they took almost the form of morbid disease, certainly adding greatly to the sickness of body.

His ear strained, he would start up whenever a footstep was heard to enter, from without, the downstairs room, start up breathing softly to Ann Canham, or to whoever might be sitting with him, "Is that Chattaway?" And Ann would cautiously peep down the ladder of a staircase, or bend her ear to listen, and then tell him who it really was. But sometimes several minutes would elapse before she could find out; sometimes she would be obliged to go down and enter the room upon some plausible errand, and look, and then come back and tell him. The state that Rupert would fall into during these moments of suspense no pen could adequately describe: his heart wildly bounding, the cold perspiration pouring from him; he feeling sick almost unto death. It was little wonder that Rupert grew weaker.

And the fears of discovery were not misplaced. Every hour brought its own danger. It was absolutely necessary that Mr. King should visit him at least once a day, and each time he ran the risk of being seen by Chattaway, or by some one

equally dangerous. Old Canham could not feign to be on the sick list for ever; especially, sufficiently sick to require daily medical attendance. George Ryle ran the risk of being seen entering the lodge; as well as Mrs. Chattaway and Maude, who *could not* abandon their stolen interviews with the poor sufferer. "It is my only happy hour in the four-and-twenty; you must not fail to come to me!" he would say to them, imploringly holding out his trembling and fevered hands. Some evenings Mrs. Chattaway would steal there, sometimes Maude, now and then both of them together.

Underlying it all in Rupert's mind was the sense of guilt, of shame, for having committed so desperate a crime. But that its record was there, in the charred spots where the ricks had been, and in his own remembered conviction, he might have doubted that he himself was the perpetrator. Perhaps, apart from those moments of madness, which the neighbourhood had been content for years to designate as the Trevlyn temper, few living men were so little likely to commit the act as Rupert. It may seem an anomaly to say this, but it was so. Rupert was of a mild, kind temperament, of the sweetest disposition in an ordinary way; one of those inoffensive people of whom we are apt to say, they would not hurt a fly. Of Rupert it was literally true; could he have gone out of his way to save harming a fly, he would have done so. Only in these rare fits was he transformed; and never had the fit been upon him as it was that unhappy night.

It was not so much repentance for the actual crime that overwhelmed him, as surprise that he had perpetrated it. He honestly believed that to commit such a crime in his sober senses would be a moral impossibility. Were the temptation held out to him, it seemed that he should flee in horror, that he should do violence to himself rather than succumb to it. "I was not conscious of the act," he would groan aloud; "I was mad when I did it." Yes, perhaps so; but the consequences remained. Poor Rupert! Remorse was his portion, and he was in truth repenting in sackcloth and ashes.

The other care upon them—supplying Rupert with appropriate nourishment—brought almost as much danger and difficulty in its train as concealing him. A worse cook for the sick, or indeed a worse cook of any sort, than Ann Canham, could not well be found. It was her misfortune, rather than her fault. Living in extreme poverty all her life, no opportunity for learning or improving herself in cooking had ever

been afforded her. The greatest luxury that ever penetrated old Canham's lodge was a bit of toasted or boiled bacon.

It was not invalid dishes that Rupert wanted now. As soon as the fever began to leave him, his appetite returned. It may be known to some of you that in certain cases of incipient consumption, the appetite is scarcely to be satisfied; and this unfortunately became the case with Rupert. Part of a roasted fowl twice or thrice a day; a slice or two out of a sirloin of beef; a cut from a leg of mutton; these he craved and required. In short, had he been at the Hold, or in a plentiful home, he would have played his full part at the daily meals, and assisted their digestion with interludes besides.

How was he to get this, or any part of it, at the lodge? Mr. King said he must have full nourishment, with wine, strong broths, and other things in addition. It was the only chance, in his opinion, to stop or counteract the weakness that was growing upon him, and which bid fair soon to attain an alarming height. Mrs. Chattaway, George Ryle, even the doctor himself would have been quite willing to supply the cost; but cost, though it goes a great way generally speaking, is not always everything. It was not so here. Where was the food to be dressed?—who was to do it?—how was it to be smuggled in? This may appear a very trifling difficulty in theory, but I assure you that in practice it was found almost insurmountable.

"Can't you dress a sweetbread?" Mr. King testily asked Ann Canham, when she was timidly confessing her incapability in the culinary art. "I'd easily manage to get it up here."

This was the first day that Rupert's appetite came back to him, just after the turn of the fever. Ann Canham hesitated. "I'm not sure, sir," she said meekly. "Could it be put in a pot and biled?"

"Put in a pot and biled!" repeated Mr. King, nettled at the question. "Much goodness there'd be in it when it came out! It's just blanched; blanched well, mind you, and dipped in egg and crumbs, and toasted in the Dutch oven. That's the nicest way of doing them."

Egg and crumbs in connection with meat dishes were as much of a mystery to Ann Canham as sweetbreads themselves. She shook her head. "And if, by ill luck, Mr. Chattaway come in and saw a sweetbread in our Dutch oven afore our fire, sir; or smelt the savour of it as he passed—what then?" she asked. "What excuse could we make to him?"

This was a phase of the difficulty all round, which had not before presented itself to the surgeon's mind. It was one that could not well be got over; the more he dwelt upon it, the more he became convinced that it could not. George Ryle, Mrs. Chattaway, Maude, all, when appealed to, said it could not. There was too much at stake to permit the risk of exciting any suspicions on the part of Mr. Chattaway; and unusual cooking in the lodge would inevitably excite them.

But it was not only Mr. Chattaway. Others who possessed noses were in the habit of passing the lodge: Cris, his sisters, Miss Diana, and many more: and some of them were in the habit of coming into it. Ann Canham was giving mortal offence, was causing much wonder, in declining her usual places of work: and many a disappointed housewife, following Nora Dickson's example, had come up, in consequence, to invade the lodge and express her sentiments personally upon the point. Ann Canham, than whom one less able to contend or to hold out against another's strong will could not be, was driven to the very verge of desperation in trying to frame plausible excuses, and she had serious thoughts of making believe to take to her bed herself—had she possessed just then a bed to take to.

No, it was impossible. She could not give out that her father was so poorly "in'ardly" as to render it unsafe to leave him—for all the excuses had to revolve round that one point—or allow her astonished visitors to see a sweetbread egged and crumbed, or any similar dainty, browning delicately in the Dutch oven before the fire. The wonder would have raised a commotion, might spread to the ears of Mr. Chattaway, and one, more cunning than the rest, might connect that unusual dish and Rupert Trevlyn together. At least, it so appeared to those who were interested in him, who lived in daily dread, almost as great as his, lest some untoward discovery should take place.

In the dilemma Mrs. Chattaway came to the rescue. "I will contrive it," she said: "the food shall be supplied from the Hold. My sister does not interfere personally with the preparation of meals, further than to give her orders in the morning, and I know I can manage it."

But, as does many another of us after speaking in impulse, Mrs. Chattaway found she had undertaken what it would scarcely be possible for her to perform. What had flashed across her mind when she spoke was, "The cook is a faithful,

kind-hearted girl, and I know I can trust her." Mrs. Chattaway did not mean trust her with the secret of Rupert, but trust her to cook a few extra dishes quietly and say nothing about it. Yes, she might, she was sure, so far trust her; the girl would cook them and be true. But it now struck Mrs. Chattaway with a sort of horror, to ask herself how she was to get them away when cooked. She could not go into the kitchen herself, have the meat, or fowl, or jelly, or whatever it might be, put in a basin, and walk off with it to the lodge. However, that was an after-care. She spoke to the cook, who was called Rebecca, told her she wanted some nice things dressed for a poor pensioner of *her own*, and nothing said about it. The girl was pleased and willing; all the servants were fond of their mistress; and she readily undertook the task and promised silence.

Mrs. Chattaway saw no reason to doubt the girl; quite the contrary. But nevertheless a strange sense of uneasiness lay upon her own heart, and she felt she had undertaken that which it might be impossible to perform.

CHAPTER LI.

A LETTER FOR MR. CHATTAWAY.

ALTHOUGH an insignificant place, Barbrook and its environs received their letters early. The bags were dropped by the London mail train at Barmester in the middle of the night; and as the post-office arrangements at that town were well conducted—which cannot be said for all towns—by eight o'clock Barbrook had its letters.

Rather before that hour than after it, they were delivered at Trevlyn Hold. Being the residence of chiefest importance in the neighbourhood, the postman was in the habit of beginning his round there; it had been so in imperious old Squire Trevlyn's time, and it was so still. Thus it generally happened that breakfast would be commencing at the Hold when the post came in.

It was a morning of which we must take some notice—a morning which, as Mr. Chattaway was destined afterwards to find, he would have cause to remember, to date from, to his dying day. If Miss Diana Trevlyn happened to see the post-

man approaching the house, she would most likely walk to the hall-door and receive the letters into her own hands. And it was so on this morning.

"Only two, ma'am," the postman said, as he delivered them to her.

She looked at the address of both. The one was a foreign letter, bearing her own name, and she thought she recognized the handwriting of Mr. Daw; the other bore the London post-mark, and was superscribed "James Chattaway, Esquire, Trevlyn Hold, near Barmester."

With an eager movement, somewhat foreign to the cold and stately motions of Miss Diana Trevlyn, she broke the seal of the former; there, at the hall-door as she stood. A thought had flashed into her mind, that the boy Rupert might have found his way at length to Mr. Daw, and that gentleman be conveying intimation of the same—as Miss Diana by letter had requested him to do. It was just the contrary, however. Mr. Daw wrote to beg a line of news from Miss Diana, as to whether tidings had been heard of Rupert. He had visited his father and mother's grave the previous day, he observed, and he did not know whether that had caused him to think more of Rupert; but ever since, all the past night and again to-day, he had been unable to get him out of his head; a feeling was upon him (no doubt a foolish one, he added in a parenthesis) that the boy was taken, or that some other misfortune had befallen him, or was about to befall him, and he presumed to request a line from Miss Diana Trevlyn to put him out of suspense.

She folded the letter when read; pushed it into the pocket of her black watered-silk apron, and returned to the breakfast-room, carrying the one for Mr. Chattaway. As she did so, her eyes happened to fall upon the back of the letter, and she saw it was stamped with the name of a firm—Connell, Connell, and Ray.

She knew the firm by name; they were solicitors of great respectability in London. Indeed, she remembered to have entertained Mr. Charles Connell at the Hold for a few days in her father's lifetime, that gentleman being at the time engaged in some law business for Squire Trevlyn. They must be old men now, she knew; those brothers Connell; and Mr. Ray, she believed to have heard, was son-in-law to one of them.

"What can they have to write to Chattaway about?" marvelled Miss Diana; but the next moment she remembered that

they were the agents of Peterby and Jones, of Barmester, and the matter was solved in her mind: some law matters, she supposed, connected with the estate.

Miss Diana swept to her place at the head of the breakfast-table. It was filled, with the exception of two of its seats. The arm-chair opposite to her own was vacant, Mr. Chattaway's; and Cris's seat on the side. Cris was not down, but Mr. Chattaway had gone out to the men. Mrs. Chattaway was in her place next Miss Diana. She had used rarely to be down in time to begin breakfast with the rest, but that was altered now. Since these late fears concerning Rupert, it seemed that she could not rest in her bed, and would quit it with morning light.

Mr. Chattaway came in as Miss Diana was pouring out the tea, and she passed the letter down to him. Glancing casually at it as it lay by his plate, he began helping himself to some cold partridge. Cris was a capital shot, and the Hold was generally well supplied with game.

"It is from Connell and Connell," remarked Miss Diana.

"From Connell and Connell!" repeated Mr. Chattaway, in a tone of bewilderment, as if he did not recognize the name.

"Connell, Connell, and Ray, it is now," returned Miss Diana. "The firm of the old days comes more familiar to me than the later one."

"What should they be writing to me about?" cried Mr. Chattaway. But he was too busy with the partridge just then to ascertain.

"About some local business, I conclude," observed Miss Diana. "Octave, send me a small piece of that bacon. They are Peterby's agents, you know."

"And what if they are?" retorted Mr. Chattaway. "Peterbys have nothing to do with me."

That was so like Mr. Chattaway! To cavil as to what might be the contents of the letter, rather than to put the question at rest by opening it. However, when he looked off from his plate to stir his tea, he took it up and tore open the envelope.

He tore open the envelope, and cast his eyes on the letter. Miss Diana happened to be looking at him. She saw him gaze at it with an air of bewilderment; she saw him go over it again —there were apparently but some half-dozen lines—and then she saw him turn green. You may cavil at the expression if you like, but it is a correct one. The leaden complexion with

which nature had favoured Mr. Chattaway did assume a green tinge in moments of especial annoyance.

"What's the matter?" questioned Miss Diana.

Mr. Chattaway replied by a half-muttered word, and dashed the letter down. "I thought we had had enough of that folly," he presently said.

"What folly?"

He did not answer, although the query was put by Miss Diana Trevlyn. She pressed it, and Mr. Chattaway flung the letter across the table to her. "You can read it, if you choose." With some curiosity Miss Diana took it up, and read as follows:—

"SIR,

"We beg to inform you that the true heir of Trevlyn Hold, Rupert Trevlyn, is about to put in his claim to the estate, and will in a short period require to take possession of the Hold. We have been requested to write this intimation to you, and we do so in a friendly spirit, that you may be prepared to quit the house, and not be taken unawares, when Mr. Trevlyn—henceforth Squire Trevlyn—shall arrive at it.

"We are, sir, your obedient servants,

"CONNELL, CONNELL, AND RAY.

"James Chattaway, Esquire."

"Then Rupert's not dead!" were the first words that broke from Miss Diana's lips. And the exclamation, and its marked tone of satisfaction, proved of what nature had been her fears for Rupert.

Mrs. Chattaway started up with white lips. "What of Rupert?" she gasped; believing nothing else than that discovery had come.

Miss Diana, without in the least thinking it necessary to consult Mr. Chattaway's pleasure first, handed her the letter. She read it rapidly, and her fears calmed down.

"What an absurdity!" she exclaimed. Knowing what she did know of the helpless position of Rupert, the contents sounded not only absurd, but impossible. "Some one must have written it mischievously; on purpose to frighten you, James."

"Yes," said Mr. Chattaway, compressing his thin lips; "it comes from the Peterby quarter. A felon threatening to take possession of Trevlyn Hold!"

But in spite of the scorn he strove to throw into his manner,

in spite of the indomitable resolution within him to bring Rupert to punishment when he did appear—and a felon could not contend for Trevlyn Hold, Mr. Chattaway was right there; in spite of even his wife, Rupert's best friend, acknowledging the absurdity of this letter, it did disturb him in no measured degree. He stretched out his hand for it, and read it again, pondering every word; he pushed his plate from him, as he gazed on it. He had had enough breakfast for one day; he gulped down his tea, and declined to take more. Yes, it was shaking his equanimity to its centre; and the Miss Chattaways and Maude, only imperfectly understanding what was amiss, looked at each other, and at him.

Mrs. Chattaway began to feel indignant that poor Rupert's name should be thus made use of; only, so far as she could see, for the purpose of exciting Mr. Chattaway further against him. "But Connells' is a most respectable firm," she said aloud, following out her thoughts; "I cannot comprehend it."

"I say it comes from Peterby," roared Mr. Chattaway. "He and Rupert are in league. I dare say Peterby knows where he's concealed."

"Oh no, no; you are mistaken," burst incautiously from the lips of Mrs. Chattaway.

"No! Do you know where he is, pray, that you speak so confidently?"

The taunt recalled her to a sense of the danger. "James, what I meant to say was this: that it is scarcely likely Rupert would be in league with any one against you," she said in low tones. "I think he would rather try to conciliate you."

"If you think this letter emanates from Peterbys' house, why don't you go down and demand of them what they mean by writing it?" interposed Miss Diana Trevlyn, in her straightforward, matter-of-fact tone.

He nodded his head significantly. "I shall not let the grass grow under my feet before I am there."

"I cannot think it's Peterby and Jones," resumed Miss Diana. "They are quite as respectable as the Connells, and I don't believe they would league themselves with Rupert, after what he has done. I don't believe they would league themselves secretly to work mischief against any one. Anything they may have to do, they'd do openly."

Had Mr. Chattaway prevailed with himself so far as to put his temper and his prejudices aside, this might not have been far from his own opinion. He had always, in a resentful sort

of way, deemed Mr. Peterby to be an honourable man; he had never cared to be in his presence—as mean-spirited, false-hearted men, conscious of their own deficiency of truth, do shrink from upright ones. But if Peterby was not at the bottom of this, who was? Connell, Connell, and Ray were his town agents.

The very uncertainty only made him the more eager to get to them and set the matter at rest. He knew it was of no use attempting to see Mr. Peterby before ten o'clock, but he would see him then. He ordered his horse to be ready, and rode into Barmester attended by his groom. As ten o'clock struck, he was at their office-door.

A quarter-of-an-hour's detention, and then he was admitted to Mr. Peterby's room. That gentleman was sweeping a heap of open letters into a corner of the table at which he sat, and the master of Trevlyn Hold shrewdly suspected that his waiting had been caused by Mr. Peterby's opening and reading of these letters. He proceeded at once to the business that brought him there, and taking his own letter out of his pocket, handed it to Mr. Peterby.

"Connell, Connell, and Ray are your agents in London, I believe? They used to be."

"And are still," said Mr. Peterby. "What is this?'

"Be so good as to read it," replied Mr. Chattaway.

The lawyer ran his eyes over it, carelessly, as it seemed to those eyes watching him. Then he looked up. "Well?"

"In writing this letter to me—I received it, you perceive, by post this morning, if you'll look at the date—did they, Connell and Connell, get instructions for it from you?"

"From me!" echoed Mr. Peterby. "Not they. I know nothing at all about it. I can't make it out."

"You are a friend of Rupert Trevlyn's, and they are your agents," remarked Mr. Chattaway, after a pause.

"My good sir, I tell you I know nothing whatever of this. Connells are our agents; but I never sent any communication to them with regard to Rupert Trevlyn in my life; never had cause to send one. If you ask me my opinion, I should say that if the lad—should he be still living—entertains hopes of coming into Trevlyn Hold after this last escapade of his, he must be a great simpleton. I expect you'd prosecute him, instead of giving him up the Hold."

"I should," quietly answered Mr. Chattaway. "But what do Connell and Connell mean by sending me such a letter as this?"

"It is more than I can tell you, Mr. Chattaway. We have received a communication from them ourselves this morning upon the subject. I was opening it when you were announced to me as being here."

He bent over the letters previously spoken of, selected one, and held it out to Mr. Chattaway. Instead of being written by the firm, it was a private letter from Mr. Ray to Mr. Peterby. It merely stated that the true heir of Squire Trevlyn, Rupert, was about shortly to take possession of his property, the Hold, and they (Connell, Connell, and Ray) should require Mr. Peterby to act as local solicitor in the proceedings, should a solicitor be necessary.

Mr. Chattaway began to feel cruelly uneasy. Rupert had committed that great fault, and was in danger of punishment for it—*would* be punished for it by his country's laws; but in this new uneasiness that important fact seemed to lose half its significance. "And you have not instructed them?" he repeated.

"Nonsense, Mr. Chattaway! it is not likely. I cannot make out what they mean, any more than you can. The nearest conclusion I can come to is, that they must be acting from instructions received from that half-parson who was here, that Mr. Daw."

"No," said Mr. Chattaway, "I think not. Miss Trevlyn heard from that man this morning, and he appears to know nothing of Rupert. He asks for news of him."

"Well, it is a curious thing altogether. I shall write by to-night's post to Ray, and inquire what he means."

Mr. Chattaway, suspicious Mr. Chattaway, pressed one more question. "Have you any notion at all where Rupert is likely to be? That he is in hiding, and accessible to some people, is evident from these letters from Connell's house."

"I have already informed you that I know nothing whatever of Rupert Trevlyn," was the lawyer's answer. "Whether he is alive or whether he is dead I know not. You cannot know less of him yourself than I do."

Mr. Chattaway was obliged to be contented with the answer. He went out and proceeded direct to Mr. Flood's, and laid the letter—his letter—before him. "What sort of thing do you call that?" he intemperately uttered, when it was read. "Connell and Connell must be infamous men to write it."

"Stop a bit," said Mr. Flood, who had his eyes strained on the letter. "There's more in this than meets the eye."

"You don't think it's a joke—done to annoy me?"

"A joke! Connell and Connell would not lend themselves to a joke. No, I don't think it's that."

"Then what do you think?"

Mr. Flood was several minutes before he replied, and his silence drove Mr. Chattaway to the verge of exasperation. "It is difficult to know what to think," said the lawyer presently. "I should be inclined to say they have been brought into personal communication with Rupert Trevlyn, or with somebody acting for him: perhaps the latter is the most probable. And I should also say they must have been convinced, by documentary or other evidence, of there existing a good foundation for Rupert's claims to the Hold. Mr. Chattaway—if I may speak the truth to you—I should dread this letter."

Mr. Chattaway felt as if a bucket of cold water had been suddenly flung over him, and was running down his back. "Why is it that you turn against me?"

"*Turn* against you! I don't know what you mean. I don't turn against you; quite the opposite. I am willing to act for you; to do anything I legally can to meet the fear."

"Why *do* you fear?"

"Because Connell, Connell, and Ray are keen and cautious practitioners as well as honourable men, and I do not think they would write a letter so decided as this, unless they knew they were fully justified in doing so, and were prepared to follow it out."

"You are a pretty Job's comforter," gasped Mr. Chattaway.

CHAPTER LII.

A DAY OF MISHAPS.

REBECCA the servant was true. She was true and crafty in her faithfulness to her mistress, and she contrived to get various dainties prepared and conveyed unsuspiciously under her apron, watching her opportunity, to the sitting-room of Madam, where they were hidden away in a closet, and the key turned upon them. So far, so good. But that was not all: the greatest difficulty lay in transporting them to Rupert.

The little tricks and ruses that the lodge and those in its

secret learnt to be expert in at this time, were worthy of the most private inquiry office going. Ann Canham, at some given hour named, would be standing at the open door of the lodge, apparently enjoying an interlude of idleness; and Mrs. Chattaway, with timid steps, and eyes that wandered everywhere lest witnesses were about, would come down the avenue: opposite the lodge door, by some sleight of hand, a parcel, or a basket, or a bottle would be transferred from under her large shawl to Ann Canham's hands. The latter would close the door and slip the bolt, while the lady would walk swiftly on through the gate, for the purpose of taking foot exercise in the road. Or perhaps it would be Maude that went through this little rehearsal, instead of Madam. But at the best it was all difficult to accomplish for many reasons, and might at any time be stopped. If only the extra cooking in the kitchen came to the knowledge of Miss Diana Trevlyn, it would be quite impossible to venture to continue that cooking, and next to impossible any longer to conceal the proximity of Rupert.

One day, which must surely have dawned under some unlucky star, a disastrous *contretemps* ensued. It happened that Miss Diana Trevlyn had arranged to take the Miss Chattaways to a morning concert at Barmester. Maude might have gone, but excused herself to Miss Diana: while Rupert's fate hung in the balance, it was scarcely seemly, she urged, that she should be seen at public festivals. Cris had gone out shooting that day; Mr. Chattaway, as was supposed, was at Barmester; and when dinner was served, only Mrs. Chattaway and Maude sat down to it. It was a plain dinner—a piece of roast beef; and during a momentary absence of James, who was waiting at table, Maude exclaimed in a low tone—

"Aunt Edith, if we could only get a slice of this to Rupert; hot as it is!"

"I was thinking of it," said Mrs. Chattaway. "If——"

The servant returned to the room, and the conversation was stopped. But his mistress, under some rather confused plea of there being so few at table, dismissed him, saying she would ring. And then the thought was carried out. A small friendly sauce-tureen which happened to be on the table was made the receptacle for some of the hot meat, and Maude put on her bonnet and stole away with it.

An unlucky venture. In her haste to reach the lodge unmolested, she spilt some of the gravy, and was stopping to wipe it with her handkerchief, when she was interrupted by Mr.

Chattaway. It was close to the lodge. Maude's heart, as the saying runs, came into her mouth.

"What's that? Where are you taking it to?" he demanded, for his eyes had caught the tureen before she could slip it under her mantle.

He peremptorily took it from her unresisting hand, raised the cover, and saw two tempting slices of hot roast beef, and part of a cauliflower. Had Maude witnessed the actual discovery of Rupert by Mr. Chattaway, she could not have felt more utterly sick: her face, in its dread, was a sight to look upon.

"I ask you, to whom were you taking this?"

His resolute face, his concentrated tones, coupled with her own terror, were more than poor Maude could brave. "To Mark Canham," she faltered. There was no one whatever, except him, whom she could mention with the least plausibility: and she could not pretend to be only taking a walk, and carrying a tureen of meat with her for pleasure.

"Was it Madam's doings to send this?"

Again she could only answer in the affirmative. She might not say it was a servant's, she might not say it was herself; there was only Mrs. Chattaway. Mr. Chattaway stalked off to the Hold, tureen in hand.

His wife sat at the dinner-table, and James was removing some pastry from it as he entered. Regardless of the man's presence, he gave vent to his anger, reproaching her in no measured terms for what she had done. Meat and vegetables from his own table to be supplied to that profitless, good-for-nothing man, Canham, who already enjoyed a house and half-a-crown a week for doing nothing! How dared she be guilty of extravagance so great, of wilful waste? And the master of Trevlyn Hold called for a warm plate, turned out the contents of the tureen, and actually began to eat them for his own dinner.

It was a very Benjamin's portion for any one's dinner; there was no doubt of that; more, in fact, than one man could eat, unless his appetite was remarkably good. This fact did not tend to lessen the anger or the astonishment of Mr. Chattaway. He stared at the meat, he turned it over and over; and he talked and reproached so fast that his poor wife, between mortification and terror, burst into tears; and James, who possessed more delicacy than his master, escaped from the room. Maude had not dared to re-enter it.

The scene came to an end; all such scenes do, it is to be

hoped; and the afternoon went on. Mr. Chattaway went out again, Cris had not come in, Miss Diana and the young ladies did not return, and Mrs. Chattaway and Maude were still alone. "I shall go down to see him, Maude," the former said in a low tone, breaking an unhappy silence. "And I shall take him something to eat; I will risk it. He has had nothing from us to-day."

Maude scarcely knew what to answer: her own fright was not yet over. Mrs. Chattaway dressed herself, took the little provision-basket—they dared not make it a large one—and went out. It was dusk—all but dark; Mrs. Chattaway was surprised to find it so dark, but the evening was a gloomy one. Scarcely daring to proceed, looking here, peering there, with slow and cautious steps she walked. Meeting no one, she gained the lodge, opened its door with a quick hand, and——— stole away again silently and swiftly, with perhaps the greatest terror she had ever felt rushing over her heart.

For, the first figure she saw there was that of her husband, and the first voice she heard was his. She pushed her way amidst the trunks of the almost leafless trees, and concealed herself as she best could.

In returning that evening, it had struck Mr. Chattaway as he passed the lodge that he could not do better than favour old Canham with a piece of his mind, and forbid him, under pain of being instantly dismissed and discarded, to rob the Hold (it was so he phrased it) of so much as a scrap of bread. Old Canham, knowing what there was at stake, took it patiently, never denying that the beef (which Mr. Chattaway enlarged upon) might have been meant for him. Ann Canham stood on the upright staircase, against the closed chamber of Rupert, shivering and shaking; and poor Rupert himself, who had not failed to hear and recognize that loud voice, lay as one in agony.

Mr. Chattaway was in the midst of his last sentence of reproof, which became louder and harsher as the winding-up drew near, when the front-door was suddenly opened, and as suddenly shut again. He had his back to it, but he turned round just in time to catch a glimpse of somebody's petticoats before the door closed.

It was a somewhat singular proceeding, and Mr. Chattaway, always curious and suspicious, opened the door after a minute's pause, and looked out. He could see no one. He looked up the avenue—which was the way the petticoats had

seemed to turn—he looked down; he stepped out to the gate, and gazed up and down the road. Whoever it was, had disappeared.

"Did you see who it was that flung the door open in that manner?" he demanded of old Canham.

Old Canham had stood deferentially during the lecture, leaning on his stick. He had not seen who it was, and therefore could answer readily, but he strongly suspected it to be Mrs. Chattaway. "Maybe 'twere some 'ooman bringing sewing up for Ann, Squire. They mostly comes at dusk, not to hinder their own work."

"Then why couldn't they come in?" retorted Mr. Chattaway "Why need they run away as if caught in some mischief?"

Old Canham wisely declined an answer: and Mr. Chattaway, after a further parting admonition, finally quitted the lodge, and took his way up the avenue towards the Hold. But for her dark attire, and the darker shades of evening, he might have detected his wife there, watching him pass.

It seemed an unlucky day. Mrs. Chattaway, her heart beating with its excitement and fear, came out of her hiding-place when the last echoes of his steps had died away and almost met the carriage as it thundered up the avenue, bringing her daughters and Miss Diana from Barmester. When she did reach the lodge, Ann Canham had the door open an inch or two, looking out for her. "Take it," she cried, giving the basket to Ann as she advanced to the stairs, "I have not a minute to stop. How is he to-night?"

"Madam," whispered Ann Canham, in her meek, unassuming voice, but somehow, meek though it was, there was that in its tone to-night which arrested the steps of Mrs. Chattaway, "if he continues to get worse and weaker, if he cannot be got away from here and from these perpet'al frights what come upon him, I fear me he'll die. He has never been as bad as he is to-night."

She untied her bonnet, and stole upstairs into Rupert's room. By the rushlight that burned there she could see the ravages of illness on his wasting features; features that seemed to have changed for the worse even since she had seen him that time last night. He turned his blue eyes, bright and wild with disease, bodily and mental, on her as she entered.

"Oh, Aunt Edith! Is he gone? I thought I should just have died with fright, here as I lay."

"He is gone, darling," she answered, bending over him, and speaking with reassuring tenderness. "You look worse to-night, Rupert."

"It is this stifling room, aunt; it is killing me. At least, it is giving me no chance to get better. If I had only a nice airy room at the Hold!—if I could lie there without fear, and be waited on—I might get better then. Aunt Edith, I wish the past few weeks could be blotted out! I wish I had not been overtaken by that fit of madness?"

Ah! he could not wish it as she did. Her tears silently fell on his hollow cheeks, and she began in the desperate need to debate in her own heart whether that, which they had deemed impossible, might not be accomplished—disarming the anger of Mr. Chattaway, and getting him to pardon Rupert. In that case only could he be brought home to the Hold, or moved from where he was. Perhaps—perhaps Diana might effect it? If she did not, no one could. As she thought of its utter hopelessness, there came to her recollection that recent letter from Connell and Connell, which had so upset the equanimity of Mr. Chattaway. She had not yet spoken of it to Rupert, but she mentioned it now. Her private opinion was, that Rupert must have written to the London lawyers for the purpose of vexing Mr. Chattaway.

"It is not right, Rupert dear," she whispered. "It cannot do you any good, but harm. If it does no other harm, it will increase Mr. Chattaway's angry feelings towards you. Indeed, Rupert, it was wrong."

He looked up in surprise from his pillow. "I don't know what you mean, Aunt Edith. Connell and Connell? What should I do, writing to Connell and Connell?"

She explained to him what there was in the letter, reciting its contents as accurately as she could remember them. Rupert only stared.

"Acting for me!—that I should soon take possession of the Hold! Well, I don't know anything about it," he wearily answered. "Why does not Mr. Chattaway go up and ask them what they mean? Connell and Connell don't know me, and I don't know them."

"It seemed to me the most unlikely thing in the world that you should have written to them, Rupert, for there was no end that it would answer; and besides, you were lying here too ill to write to any one. But then what else was I to think?"

"They'd better have written to say I was going to take pos-

session of the grave," he resumed; "there'd be more sense in that. Perhaps I am, Aunt Edith."

More sense in it? Ay, that there would be. Every pulse in Mrs. Chattaway's heart echoed the words. She did not answer, and there ensued a pause, broken only by the sound of his somewhat painful breathing.

"Do you think I shall die, Aunt Edith?"

"Oh, my boy, I hope not; I hope not! But it is all in God's will. Rupert, darling, it seems a sad thing, especially to the young, to leave this world; but do you know what I often think as I lie and sigh through my sleepless nights: that it would be a blessed change both for you and for me if God were to take us from it, and give us a place in heaven."

Another pause. "You can tell Mr. Chattaway that you feel sure I had nothing to do with the letter you speak of, Aunt Edith."

She shook her head. "No, Rupert; the less I say the better. It would not do: I should fear some chance word on my part might betray you: and all I could say would not make any impression on Mr. Chattaway."

"You are not going!" he exclaimed, as she rose from her seat on the bed.

"I must. I wish I could stay, but I dare not: indeed, it was not safe to-night to come in at all."

"Aunt Edith, if you could only stay! It is so lonely. Four-and-twenty hours before I shall see you or Maude again! It is like being left alone to die."

"Not to die, I trust," she said, the tears falling fast from her eyes. "We shall be together some time for ever, but I pray that we may have a little more happiness on earth first!"

Very full was her heart that night, and but for the fear that her red eyes would betray her, and questions be asked, she could have wept all the way home. Stealing in at the side door, she gained her room, and found that Mr. Chattaway, fortunately, had not discovered her absence.

A few minutes after she entered, the house was in a commotion. Cries were heard proceeding from the kitchen, and Mrs. Chattaway and others hastened towards it. One of the servants was badly scalded. Most unfortunately, it happened to be the cook, Rebecca. In taking some calf's-foot jelly from the fire, she had, by some inadvertence, turned the whole boiling liquid over her feet.

Miss Diana, who was worth a thousand of Mrs. Chattaway in an emergency, had the girl placed in a recumbent position, had her stockings cut off, and sent one of the grooms on horseback for Mr. King. But Miss Diana, while sparing nothing that could assist or relieve the sufferer, did not at all conceal her displeasure at the awkwardness. She cast her eyes on the pool near the kitchen grate, and saw the egg-shells and lemon-peel floating in it; saw it with astonishment.

"Was it *jelly* you were making, Rebecca?" she demanded, scarcely believing her senses.

Rebecca was lying back in a large chair, her feet raised. The young ladies, the servants, were crowding round: even Mr. Chattaway had come to see what might be the cause of the commotion. She made no answer.

Bridget did; rejoicing, no doubt, in her superior knowledge. "Yes, ma'am, it was jelly: she had just boiled it up."

Miss Diana wheeled round to Rebecca. "What were you making jelly for? It was not ordered."

Rebecca knew not what to say. She cast an almost imperceptible glance at Mrs. Chattaway. "Yes, it was ordered," said the latter, scarcely above her breath. "I ordered it."

"You!" returned Miss Diana. "What for?" But Miss Diana spoke in her surprise only; not to find fault: it was so very unusual a thing for Mrs. Chattaway to interfere in the domestic arrangements. It surprised them all, and her daughters looked at her. Poor Mrs. Chattaway could not put forth the plea that it was being made for herself, for calf's-foot jelly was a thing she never touched. The pause, the confusion on his wife's face, attracted the notice of Mr. Chattaway.

"Possibly you were intending to send it to regale old Canham with?" he scornfully said, in allusion to what had passed that day. Not that he believed anything so improbable.

"Madam knows the young ladies like it, and she told me to make some," good-naturedly spoke up Rebecca from the midst of her pain.

The excuse served, and the surprise passed. Miss Diana privately thought what a poor housekeeper her sister would make, ordering things when they were not required, and Mr. Chattaway quitted the scene. When the doctor arrived and had attended to the patient, Mrs. Chattaway, who was then in her room, sent to request him to come up to her before he left, adding to the message that she did not feel well.

He came up immediately. She put a question or two about

the injury to the girl, which was not great, he answered, and would not keep her a prisoner long; and then Mrs. Chattaway lowered her voice, and spoke in the softest whisper.

"Mr. King, you must tell me. Is not Rupert worse?

"He is very ill," was the answer. "He certainly gets worse instead of better."

"Will he die?"

"Well, I do believe he will die, unless he can be got out of that unwholesome closet of a place. The question is, how is it to be done?"

"It cannot be done, Mr. King; it cannot be done unless Mr. Chattaway can be propitiated. That is the only chance."

"Mr. Chattaway never will be," thought Mr. King in his heart. "Everything is against him where he is," he said aloud: "the bad air of the room, the perpetual fear that is upon him, the want of hot and regular food. The provisions conveyed to him at chance times, eaten cold, as they chiefly have to be, are a poor substitute for the hot meals he requires."

"And they will be stopped now," said Mrs. Chattaway. "Rebecca has cooked them for me privately, but she cannot do it now. Mr. King, *what* can be done?"

"I don't know, indeed. It will not be safe to attempt to move him. In fact, I question if he would consent to it, his dread of being discovered is so great."

"Will you do all you can?" she urged.

"To be sure," he replied. "I *am* doing all I can. I got him another bottle of port-wine in to-day. If you only saw me trying to dodge into the lodge unperceived, and taking my observations before I whisk out, you wouldn't say but I am as anxious as you can be, my dear lady. Still—I don't hesitate to avow it—it will be, I believe, life or death, according as we can manage to get him away from that hole he's lying in, and to set his mind at rest."

He wished her good night, and went out. "Life or death!" Mrs. Chattaway stood at the window, and gazed forth at the dusky night, recalling over and over again the words to her heart. "Life or death!" There was no earthly chance, except the remote one of appeasing Mr. Chattaway.

CHAPTER LIII.

A SURPRISE FOR MR. CHATTAWAY.

GEORGE RYLE by no means admired the uncertainty in which he was kept as to the Upland Farm. Had Mr. Chattaway been any other than Mr. Chattaway, had he been a straightforward man, George would have said, "Give me an answer. Yes or No." In point of fact, he did say so to Mr. Chattaway; but he could not get a decisive reply from him, one way or the other. Mr. Chattaway was pretty liberal in his covert sneers as to one with no means of his own taking so extensive a farm as the Upland; but he did not positively say, "I will not lease it to you." George bore the shafts with equanimity. He possessed that very desirable gift, a sweet temper; and he was, and could not help feeling that he was, so really superior to Mr. Chattaway, that he could afford to allow some latitude to that gentleman's evil tongue.

But the time was going on; it was necessary that some decision should be arrived at; and one morning George went up again to the Hold, determined to receive a final answer. As he was entering the steward's room, he met Ford, the clerk at Blackstone, coming out of it.

"Is Mr. Chattaway in there?" asked George.

"He's there, as far as that goes," replied Ford. "But if you want to get any business out of him this morning, you won't, that's all. I have tramped all the way up here, about a matter that's in a hurry, and I have had my walk for my pains. Chattaway won't do anything, or say anything; doesn't seem capable; says he shall be at Blackstone by-and-by. And that's all I've got to go back with."

"Why won't he?"

"Goodness knows. He seems to have had some shock or fright. He was staring at a letter when I went in, and I left him staring at it still when I came out, his wits evidently gone wool-gathering. Good morning, Mr. Ryle."

The young man went his way, and George entered the room. Mr. Chattaway was seated at his desk; an open letter before him, as Ford had said. It was one that had been delivered by that morning's post, and it had brought the

sweat of dismay out upon his brow. He looked at George angrily.

"Who's this again? Am I never to be at peace? What do you want?"

"Mr. Chattaway, I want an answer. If you will not let me the Upland Farm——"

"I will give you no answer this morning, George Ryle. I am otherwise occupied, and I cannot be bothered with home business."

"Will you give me an answer—at all?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Come then."

George saw that something had indeed put Mr. Chattaway out; he appeared incapable of business, as Ford had intimated, and it would be policy, perhaps, to suffer the matter to rest until to-morrow. But a resolution came into George's mind to do at once what he had sometimes thought of doing—to make a friend, if possible, of Miss Diana Trevlyn. He went about the house until he found her: he was almost as much at home in it as poor Rupert had been. Miss Diana happened to be alone in the breakfast-room. She was looking over what appeared to be bills, but she laid them aside at his entrance, and she—it was a most unusual thing—condescended to ask after the health of her sister, Mrs. Ryle.

"Miss Diana, I want you to be my good friend," he said, in the winning manner that made George Ryle liked by every one, as he drew a chair near to her. "Will you whisper a word for me into Mr. Chattaway's ear?"

"About that Upland Farm?"

"Yes. I cannot get an answer from him. He has promised me one to-morrow morning, but I do not rely upon getting it. I must be at some certainty. There's another farm that I have my eye upon if I cannot get Mr. Chattaway's; but it is at a distance from here, and I shall not like it half so well. While he keeps me shilly-shallying over this one, I may lose them both. There's an old proverb, you know, about two stools."

"Was that a joke the other day, the hint you gave about marrying?" inquired Miss Diana.

"It was sober earnest. If I can get the Upland Farm, I shall, I hope, take my wife home to it almost as soon as I am installed there myself."

"Is she a good manager, a practical woman?"

George smiled. "No. She is a lady."

"I thought so," was the remark of Miss Diana, delivered in a very knowing tone. "I can tell you and your wife, George, that it will be uphill work for both of you."

"For a time; I know that. But, Miss Diana, ease, when it comes, will be all the more enjoyable for having been worked for. I often think that the prosperity of those who have honestly worked for it and earned it, must be far sweeter than the monotonous abundance of those who are born prosperous."

"That's true. The worst is, that sometimes the best years of life are over before prosperity comes."

"But those years have had their pleasure, in working on for it. I question whether actual prosperity ever brings the pleasure that we enjoy when anticipating and working for it. If we have no end to look to and scheme for, we should not be happy. Will you say a word for me to him, Miss Diana?"

"First of all, tell me the name of the lady. I suppose you have no objection—you may trust me."

George's lips parted with a smile, and a faint flush stole over his features. "I shall have to tell you before I win her, Miss Diana, if only to obtain your consent to my taking her from the Hold."

"*My* consent! I have nothing to do with it. You must get that from Mr. and Madam Chattaway."

"If I have yours, I am not sure that I should care to ask—his."

"Of whom do you speak?" she rejoined, looking puzzled.

"Of Maude Trevlyn."

Miss Diana rose from her chair, and stared at him in very astonishment. "Maude Trevlyn!" she repeated. "Since when have you thought of Maude Trevlyn?"

"Since I thought of any one—thought at all, I was going to say. I loved Maude—yes, *loved* her, Miss Diana—when she was only a child."

"And you have not thought of any one else?"

"Never. I have loved Maude, and I have been content to wait for her. But that I was so trammelled with the farm at home, keeping it for Mrs. Ryle and Treve, I might have spoken before."

Maude Trevlyn was evidently not the lady upon whom Miss Diana's suspicions had fallen. It seemed that she could not recover from her surprise—could scarcely yet admit the facts to her mind, so far as to realize them. "Have you never given

cause to another to—to—suspect any admiration on your part?" she resumed, breaking the silence.

"Believe me, I never have. On the contrary," he added, glancing at Miss Diana with peculiar significance for a moment, and his tone was most impressive, "I have cautiously abstained from doing so."

"Ah, I see." And Miss Trevlyn's tone was not less significant than his.

"Will you give her to me, Miss Diana?" he pleaded, in his softest and most persuasive voice.

"I don't know," she answered. "George Ryle, there may be trouble over this."

"Do you mean with Mr. Chattaway?"

"I mean—— No matter what I mean. I think there will be trouble over it."

"There need be none if you will only sanction it. But that you might misconstrue me, Miss Diana, I would urge you to give her to me for Maude's own sake. This escapade of poor Rupert's has rendered Mr. Chattaway's roof an undesirable one for her."

"Maude is a Trevlyn, and must marry a gentleman," spoke Miss Diana.

"I am one," said George, quietly. "Pardon me, Miss Diana, if I remind you that my descent is equal to that of the Trevlyns. In the days gone by——"

"You need not enter upon it," was the interruption. "I do not forget it. But gentle descent is not all that is necessary to render a marriage eligible. Maude will have money, and it is only right that she should marry one who possesses it in an equal degree."

"Maude will not have a shilling," cried George, impulsively.

"Indeed! Who told you so?"

George laughed. "It is what I have always supposed. Where is she to have money from?"

"She will have a great deal of money," persisted Miss Diana. "The half of my fortune, at least, will be Maude's. The other half I intended for Rupert. Did you suppose the last of the Trevlyns, Maude and Rupert, would be turned out on the world penniless?"

So! It had been Miss Diana's purpose to bequeath her money to them! Yes; loving power though she did; acquiescing in the act of usurping Trevlyn Hold by Mr. Chattaway, she intended to make it up in some degree to the,

children. "Has Maude learnt to care for you," she suddenly asked of George. "You hesitate!"

"If I hesitate, Miss Diana, it is not because I have no answer to give, but whether it would be quite fair to Maude to give it. The truth may be best, however; she *has* learnt to care for me. Perhaps you will answer me a question—have you any objection to me personally?"

"George Ryle, had I had objection to you personally, I should have ordered you out of the room the instant you mentioned Maude's name. Were your position a better one, I would give you Maude to-morrow—so far as my giving could avail. But to enter the Upland Farm upon borrowed money?—no; I do not think that will do for Miss Maude Trevlyn."

"It would be a better position for her than the one she now holds, as governess to Mr. Chattaway's children," replied George, boldly. "A better, and a far happier."

"Nonsense," said Miss Diana. "Maude Trevlyn's position at Trevlyn Hold is not to be looked upon as that of governess, but as a daughter of the house. It was well that both she and Rupert should have some occupation."

"And on the other score?" resumed George. "May I dare to say the truth to you, Miss Diana, that in quitting the Hold for the home I shall make for her, she will be leaving misery for happiness?"

Miss Diana rose. "That is enough for the present," said she. "It has come upon me with surprise, and I must give it some hours' consideration before I can even realize it. With regard to the Upland Farm, I will ask Mr. Chattaway to accord you preference if he can do so: the two matters are quite distinct and apart one from the other. I think you might prosper at the Upland Farm, and be a good tenant; but I decline—and this you must distinctly understand—to give you any hope now with regard to Maude."

George held out his hand with his sunny smile. "I will wait until you have considered it, Miss Diana."

She took her way at once to Mrs. Chattaway's room. Happening, as she passed the corridor window, to cast her eyes to the front of the house, she saw George Ryle cross the lawn on his way from it. At the same moment, Octave Chattaway ran after him, evidently calling to him.

He stopped and turned. He could do no less. And Octave stood with him, laughing and talking rather more freely than she might have done, had she been aware of what had just

taken place. Miss Diana drew in her severe lips, changed her course, and sailed back to the hall-door. Octave was coming in then.

"Manners have changed since I was a girl," remarked Miss Diana to her. "It would scarcely have been deemed seemly then for a young lady to run after a gentleman as he was leaving the house. I do not like it, Octave."

"Manners do change," returned Miss Chattaway, in a tone that she made as slighting as she dared. "It was only George Ryle, Aunt Diana."

"Do you know where Maude is?"

"No: I know nothing about her. I think if you gave Maude a word of reprimand on another score, instead of giving one to me, it might not be amiss, Aunt Diana. Since Rupert turned runagate—or renegade might be a better word—Maude has neglected her duties shamefully with Emily and Edith. She passes her time moithering, and lets them run wild."

"Had Rupert been your brother you might have done the same," curtly rejoined Miss Diana. "A shock like that cannot be lived down in a day. Allow me to give you a hint, Octave: should you lose Maude for the children, you will not so efficiently replace her."

"We are not likely to lose her," said Octave, opening her eyes.

"I don't know that. It strikes me as being likely that we shall. George Ryle wants her."

"Wants her for what?" asked Octave, staring very much.

"He can want her but for one thing—to be his wife. He has loved her, it seems, for years."

She had turned her back on Octave as she said this, on her way up again to Mrs. Chattaway's room; never halting, never looking back at the still, white face, that seemed to be turning into stone as it was strained after her.

In Mrs. Chattaway's sitting-room she found that lady and Maude. She entered suddenly and hastily, and had Miss Diana been of a nature given to suspicion, it might have been excited in her breast then. In their close contact, their start of surprise when interrupted, the frightened expression of their haggard countenances, there was too surely evidence of some unhappy secret. Miss Diana was closely followed into the room by Mr. Chattaway.

"Did you not hear me call?" he inquired of his sister-in-law.

"No," she replied. "I heard you on the stairs behind me, but I did not hear you speak. What is it?"

"Read that," said Mr. Chattaway.

He tossed an open letter to her. It was the one which had so put him out; which had rendered him incapable of attending to business. After digesting it alone in the best manner he could, he had now come to submit it to the keen and calm inspection of Miss Trevlyn.

"Oh," said she carelessly, as she looked at the writing, "it is another from Connell and Connell."

"Read it, will you?" repeated Mr. Chattaway, in low tones. He was too completely shaken to be anything but subdued.

Miss Diana proceeded to do so. It was a letter shorter, if anything, than the one previously received, but more peremptory, even more decided. It simply said that Mr. Rupert Trevlyn had written to inform them of his intention of taking immediate possession of Trevlyn Hold, and had requested them to acquaint Mr. Chattaway with the same. Miss Diana read it to herself, and then read it aloud for the general benefit.

"It is the most infamous thing that has ever come under my notice," said Mr. Chattaway. "What *right* have those men, those Connells, to write to me in this strain? If Rupert Trevlyn passes his time penning folly to them, is it the work of a respectable firm to perpetuate—as may be said—the jokes on me?"

Mrs. Chattaway and Maude gazed at each other, perfectly confounded. It was next to an impossibility that Rupert could have thus written as stated, to Connell and Connell. If they had only dared to defend him! "Why suffer it to put you out, James?" Mrs. Chattaway ventured to say. "Rupert *cannot* be writing such letters; he *cannot* be thinking of attempting to take possession here; the bare idea is absurd: treat it as such."

"But these communications to me from Connell and Connell are not the less disgraceful," was the reply of Mr. Chattaway. "I'd as soon be annoyed with anonymous letters."

Miss Diana Trevlyn had not spoken. The affair, to her keen mind, began to wear a strange appearance. She looked off from the letter—she seemed to have been examining its every word—at Mr. Chattaway. "Were Connell and Connell not so respectable, I should say that they have lent themselves to playing a sorry joke upon you for the purpose of the worst

sort of annoyance: being what they are, that view falls to the ground. There is only one possible solution to it: but——"

"And what's that?" eagerly interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

"That Rupert is amusing himself, and has contrived to impose upon Connell and Connell some notion of the plausibility of his claim——"

"He has not; he never has," broke in Mrs. Chattaway. "I mean," she more calmly added, as she recollected herself, "that Connell and Connell could not be imposed upon by any foolish claim that might be put forth by Rupert."

"I wish you would hear me out," was the composed rejoinder of Miss Diana. "It is what I was about to say. Had Connell and Connell been different men, they might be so imposed upon; but I do not think they, or any firm of similar standing, would presume to write such letters as these to the master of Trevlyn Hold, unless they had substantial grounds for doing it."

"Then what can the letters mean?" cried Mr. Chattaway, wiping his hot face.

Ay, what could they mean? It was indeed a puzzle, and the matter began to assume a serious form. What had been the vain boastings of Mr. Daw, compared with this? Cris Chattaway, when he came home, and this second letter was shown to him, was loudly indignant, but all the indignation that Mr. Chattaway had been prone to indulge in seemed to have gone out of *him*. Mr. Flood wrote to Connell and Connell to request an explanation, and received a courteous and immediate reply. But there was no further information in it than the letters themselves had contained—or than even Mr. Peterby had elicited when he wrote up, on his own part, a private letter to Mr. Ray: nothing but that Mr. Rupert Trevlyn was about to take possession of his own again, Trevlyn Hold.

CHAPTER LIV.

A GHOST FOR OLD CANHAM.

TREVLYN HOLD was a fine place, the cynosure and envy of the neighbourhood around; and yet it would perhaps be impossible in all that neighbourhood for any family to be found so completely miserable as that which inhabited the Hold. The familiar saying is a very true one: "All is not gold that glitters."

Enough has been said of the trials and discomforts of Mrs. Chattaway; they had been many and varied; but never had trouble accumulated upon her head as it had now. The terrible secret that Rupert was within hail, wasting unto death, was torturing her brain by night and day. It seemed that the whole weight of it lay upon her; that she was responsible for his weal and woe: if he died would reproach not lie at her door, be cast upon her by the world; would remorse not be her portion for ever? It might be thrown in her teeth then that she should have disclosed the secret, and not have left him there to die.

But how disclose it? Since the second letter received from Connell, Connell, and Ray, Mr. Chattaway had been doubly bitter against Rupert—if that was possible; and there could be no manner of doubt that to disclose to him Rupert's hiding-place would only be to consign him to a prison. Mr. Chattaway was another who was miserable in his home. Suspense, anticipation, are far worse than reality; and the present master of Trevlyn Hold would never realize in his own heart the cruel evils attendant on being turned from the Hold (should that consummation arrive) as he was realizing them now. Suspense, dread, uncertainty, are hard to bear; and his days were one prolonged scene of torture. Miss Diana Trevlyn partook of the general discomfort: for the first time in her life a sense of ill oppressed her. She knew nothing of the secret regarding Rupert; she somewhat scornfully threw away the vague ideas imparted by the letters from Connell and Connell; and yet Miss Diana was conscious of being oppressed with a sense of ill, which weighed her down, and made her life a burden.

The evil had come at last. Retribution, which they too surely invoked when they diverted God's laws of right and

justice from their direct course years ago, was working itself out now. Retribution is a thing that *must* come; though tardy, as it had been in this case, it is sure. Look around you, you who have had much of life's experience, who may be drawing into its "sear and yellow leaf." It is impossible but that you must have gathered up in the garner of your mind instances that you have noted in your career. In little things and in great, the working of evil inevitably brings forth its reward. Years, and years, and years may first elapse; so many, that the hour of vengeance seems to have rolled itself away under the glass of time; but we need never hope that, for it cannot be. In your time, ill-doer, or in your children's, it will surely come.

The agony of mind, endured now by the inmates of Trevlyn Hold, seemed punishment enough for a whole lifetime and its misdoings. Should they indeed be turned from it, as these mysterious letters seemed to indicate, that open, tangible punishment would be as nothing to what they were mentally enduring now. And they could not speak of their griefs one to another, and so lessen them in ever so slight a degree. Mr. Chattaway would not speak of the dread that was tugging at his heart-strings—for it seemed to him that only to speak of the *possibility* of being driven forth, might bring it the nearer; and his unhappy wife dared not so much as breathe the name of Rupert, and the fatal secret she held.

She, Mrs. Chattaway, was puzzled more than all by these letters of Connell and Connell's. Mr. Chattaway could trace their source (at least he strove to do so) to the malicious mind and pen of Rupert; but Mrs. Chattaway knew that Rupert it could not well be. Nevertheless, she had been staggered on the arrival of the second to find it explicitly stated that Rupert Trevlyn had written to them to announce his speedy intention of taking possession of the Hold. "Rupert had written to them!" What was she to think? If it was not Rupert, somebody else must have written to them in his name; but who would be likely to trouble themselves now for the lost Rupert? —regarded as dead by three parts of the world. Had Rupert written? Mrs. Chattaway determined again to ask him, and to set the question so far at rest.

But she did not do this immediately after the arrival of the letter; not for two days after. She waited the answer which Mr. Flood wrote up to Connell and Connell, spoken of in the last chapter. As soon as that came, and she found that it

afforded no elucidation whatever, then she resolved to question Rupert upon her next stolen visit to him. That same afternoon, as she returned home on foot from Barmester, she contrived to slip unseen into the lodge.

Rupert was sitting up. Mr. King had given it as his opinion that to lie constantly in bed, as he was doing, was worse for him than anything else; and in truth Rupert need not have been entirely confined to it had there been any other place for him. Old Canham's chamber opposite was more confined, more stifling, inasmuch as when the builder put in the one pane that lighted it from the roof, he had forgotten to make it to open. A small casement opened from the landing, but it did not give air to the rooms. Look at Rupert now, as Mrs. Chattaway enters! He has managed to struggle into his clothes, which hang upon him like bags, and he sits uncomfortably on a small rush-bottomed chair. Rupert's back looks as if it were broken; for he is bent nearly double with weakness, and his lips are white, and his cheeks are hollow, and his poor, weak hands tremble with joy as they are feebly raised in greeting to Mrs. Chattaway. Think what it was for him! lying for long hours, for days, in that stifling room, a prey to his fears, sometimes seeing no one for two whole days —for it was not every evening that an opportunity could be found of entering the lodge. What with the Chattaway's passing and repassing outside the lodge, and Ann Canham's grumbling visitors inside it, I can tell you that an entrance for those, who might not be seen to enter it, was not always within the range of possibility. Look at poor Rupert; at the lighting up of his eye, at the kindling hectic of his cheek!

Mrs. Chattaway contrived to squeeze herself between Rupert and the door, between the wall and the bed, and sat down on the edge of the latter as she took his hand in hers. "I am so glad to see that you have made an effort to get up, Rupert!" she whispered.

"I don't think I shall make it again, Aunt Edith. You have no conception how it has tired me. I was a good half-hour getting into my coat and waistcoat."

"But you will be all the better for it."

"I don't know," said Rupert, in a spiritless tone. "I feel as if there would never be any 'better' for me again."

She began telling him of what she had been purchasing for him at Barmester—a tongue dressed in jelly, a box of sardines, some potted meat, and similar things found in the provision

shops. They were not precisely the dishes suited to Rupert's weakly state; but since the accident to Rebecca he had been fain to put up with what could be thus procured. And then Mrs. Chattaway opened gently upon the subject of the letters.

"It seems so strange, Rupert, quite an inexplicable thing, but Mr. Chattaway has had another of those curious letters from that firm in London, Connell and Connell."

"Has he?" answered Rupert, with apathy.

Mrs. Chattaway looked at him with all the fancied penetration she possessed—in point of fact she was just one of those persons who possess none—but she could not detect the faintest sign of consciousness. "Was there anything about me in it?" he asked wearily.

"It was all about you. It said that you had written to Connell and Connell, stating your intention of taking immediate possession of the Hold."

This a little aroused him. "Connell and Connell have been writing that to Mr. Chattaway! Why, what queer people they must be!"

"Rupert! You have *not* written to them, have you?"

He looked at Mrs. Chattaway in surprise; for she had evidently asked the question seriously. "I am not strong enough to play jokes, Aunt Edith. And if I were, I should not be so senseless as to play *that* joke. What end would it answer?"

"I thought not," she murmured; "I was sure not. Setting everything else aside, Rupert, you are not well enough to write."

"No, I don't think I am. I don't suppose I could get down a side of note-paper if I tried. I could hardly scrawl those lines to George Ryle some time ago—but then the fever was upon me. No, Aunt Edith: the only letter I have written since I became a prisoner here was the one I wrote to Mr. Daw, the night I first took shelter here, just after the encounter with Mr. Chattaway, and Ann Canham posted it at Barmester the next day. What on earth can possess Connell and Connell?"

"Diana argues that Connell and Connell must be receiving these letters, or they would not write to Mr. Chattaway in the manner they are doing. For my part, I can't make it out."

"What does Mr. Chattaway say?" asked Rupert, when a fit of coughing was over. "Is he angry?"

"He is worse than angry," she seriously answered; "he is troubled. He thinks that you are writing them."

"No! Why, he might know that I shouldn't dare to do it: he might know that I am not well enough to write them."

"Nay, Rupert, you forget that Mr. Chattaway does not know you are ill."

"To be sure; I forgot that. But *troubled?* I can't believe that of Mr. Chattaway. How could a poor, weak, friendless chap, such as I, contend for the possession of Trevlyn Hold? Aunt Edith, I'll tell you what it must be. If Connells are not playing this joke themselves, to annoy Mr. Chattaway, somebody must be playing it on them."

Mrs. Chattaway acquiesced in the conclusion: it was the only one at which she could arrive.

"Oh, Aunt Edith, if he would only forgive me!" sighed Rupert. "When I get well—and I should get well, if I could go back to the Hold to Aunt Diana's nursing, and get this fear out of me—I would work night and day to pay him back the cost of the ricks. If he would only forgive me!"

Ah! none knew better than Mrs. Chattaway how vain was the wish! With the walls freshly placarded—as they had been—with further bills offering their reward for the incendiary Rupert Trevlyn; with the bitter animosity rankling in the heart of Mr. Chattaway, bitter and more bitter since that last letter, she could have told Rupert how worse than vain was any hope of forgiveness. She could have told him, had she chosen, of an unhappy scene of the past night, when she, Edith Chattaway, urged on by the miserable state of existing things and her tribulation for Rupert, had so far forgotten prudence as to all but kneel to her husband and beg him to forgive that poor incendiary; and Mr. Chattaway had been excited by it to the very depths of anger; had demanded of his wife whether she were mad or sane, that she should dare to ask it.

"Yes, Rupert," she meekly said, "I wish it also, for your sake. But, my dear, it is just an impossibility."

"If I could be got off safely out of the country, I might go to Mr. Daw for a time, and get up my strength there."

"Yes, *if* you could. But in your weak state discovery would be the result before you were clear from these walls. You cannot take flight of your own accord, and run away in the night. Every one knows you: and the police, we have heard, are keeping their eyes open."

'I'd bribe Dumps, if I had money——"

Rupert's voice dropped. A sort of commotion had arisen suddenly downstairs, and, his fears ever on the alert touching the police and Mr. Chattaway, he put up his finger to enjoin caution, and bent his head to listen. But no strange voice could be distinguished: only those of old Canham and his daughter. A short time, and Ann came up the stairs, looking strange.

"What's the matter?" panted Rupert, who was the first to catch sight of her face.

"I can't think whatever's come to father, sir," she returned. "I was in the back place, a-washing up, and I heard a sort o' cry from him, so I ran in. There he was a-standing with his hair all on end in mortal fright, and afore I could speak he began saying that he see a ghost go past. He's a-staring out o' window and saying of it still. I trust his senses are not a-leaving him!"

To hear this queer assertion from sober-minded, matter-of-fact old Canham, certainly did impart a suspicion that his senses must have deserted him. Mrs. Chattaway rose from her low seat to descend; not on this score, but that she had already lingered longer with Rupert than was prudent. She found old Canham as Ann had described him, with that peculiarly scared look on the face which some people deem equivalent to "the hair standing on end." He was staring with a fixed expression towards the Hold.

"Has anything happened to alarm you, Mark?"

Mrs. Chattaway's gentle question recalled him to himself. He turned towards her, leaning heavily on his stick, the expression of his eyes one of vague terror.

"It happened, Madam, as I had got out o' my seat, and was a-standing to look out o' winder, thinking how fine the a'ternoon was, and how bad the land wanted rain, when he come in at the gate with a fine silver-headed stick in his hand, a-turning of his head about from side to side as if (but that have struck me since) he was taking note of the old place again to see what changes there might be in it. I was struck all of a heap when I saw his figure; 'twas just the figure it used to be, only maybe a bit younger, less stout like, but when he moved his head this way and looked full at me, I felt as one turned to stone. It was his face, ma'am, if I ever saw it."

"But whose?" asked Mrs. Chattaway, smiling at his incoherence.

Old Canham glanced round before he spoke; he glanced at Mrs. Chattaway, with a half-compassionate, half-inquiring glance, as if not liking to speak. "Madam, it was the old Squire, my late master."

"It was—who?" demanded Mrs. Chattaway, less gentle than usual in her great surprise.

"It was Squire Trevlyn; Madam's father."

Mrs. Chattaway could do nothing but stare. She thought old Canham's senses were decidedly gone.

"There never was a face like his. Miss Maude—that is, Mrs. Ryle now—have his features exact; but she's not as tall and portly, being a woman. Ah, Madam, you may smile at me, but it was Squire Trevlyn."

"But, Mark, you know it is an impossibility."

"Madam, 'twas him. He must ha' come out of his grave for some purpose, and is a-visiting his own again. I never was a believer in them things afore, or thought as the dead come back to life."

Ghosts have gone out of fashion; therefore the enlightened reader will not be likely to endorse old Canham's belief. But I can tell you this much: that when Mrs. Chattaway, turning quickly up the avenue on her way to Trevlyn Hold, saw, at no great distance from her, a gentleman standing to talk to some one whom he had encountered, she stopped, as one in sudden terror, and seemed about to fall or faint. Mrs. Chattaway did not believe in "the dead coming back" any more than old Canham had believed in it; but in that moment's startled surprise she did think she saw her father.

She gazed at the figure standing there, her lips apart, the bright complexion of her face fading to an ashy paleness. Never had she seen so extraordinary a likeness. The tall, fine form, somewhat less full perhaps than of yore, the distinctly-marked features with their firm and haughty expression, the fresh tints of the clear skin, the very manner of his handling that silver-headed stick, spoke in unmistakable terms of Squire Trevlyn.

Not until they parted, the two who were talking, did Mrs. Chattaway observe that the other was Nora Dickson. Nora came down the avenue towards her; the stranger went on with his firm step and his firmly-grasped walking-stick. Mrs. Chattaway was advancing then.

"Nora, who is that?" she gasped.

"I am trying to collect my wits, if they are not scared away

for good," was Nora's response. "Madam Chattaway, you might just have flung me down with a feather. I was walking along, thinking of nothing, except my vexation that you were not at home—for Mr. George charged me to bring this note to you, and to deliver it instantly into your own hands, and nobody else's—when I met him. I didn't know whether to face him, or to scream, or to turn and run; one doesn't like to meet the dead; and I declare to you, Madam Chattaway, I believed, in my confused brain, that it was the dead. I believed it was Squire Trevlyn."

"Nora, I never saw two persons so strangely alike," she breathed, mechanically taking the note from Nora's hand. "Who is he?"

"My brain's at work to discover who he can be," returned Nora, dreamily. "I am trying to put two and two together, and I can't do it; unless the dead shall have come to life—or those whom we have believed dead."

"Nora! you cannot mean my father!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, gazing at her with a strangely perplexed face. "You know that he lies buried in Barbrook churchyard. What did he say to you?"

"Not much. He saw me staring at him, I suppose, and he stopped and asked me if I belonged to the Hold. I answered, no; I did not belong to it; I was Miss Dickson, of Trevlyn Farm. And then it was his turn to stare at me. 'I think I should have known you,' he said. 'At least, I do now that I have the clue. You are not much altered. Should you have known me?' 'I don't know you now,' I answered: 'unless you are old Squire Trevlyn come out of his grave. I never saw such a likeness.'"

"And what did he say?" eagerly asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"Nothing more. He laughed a little at my speech, and went on. Madam Chattaway, will you open the note, please, and see if there's any answer. Mr. George said it was important."

She opened the note, which had lain unheeded in her hand, and read as follows:

"Do not attempt further visits. Suspicions are abroad.
"G. B. R."

She had just attempted one, and paid it. Had it been watched? A rush of fear bounded within her for Rupert's sake.

"There's no answer, Nora," said Mrs. Chattaway: and she turned on her way homewards, not unlike one in a dream. Who *was* that man before her? What was his name? where did he come from? Why should he bear this strange likeness to her dead father? Ah, why, indeed! The truth never for one moment penetrated to the mind of Mrs. Chattaway.

He went on: he, the stranger. When he came to the lawn before the house, he stepped on to it and halted. He looked to this side, he looked to that; he gazed up at the house, into every window, just as one loves to look on returning to a beloved home after an absence of years. He stood with his head thrown back; his right hand stretched out, the stick it grasped planted firm and upright on the ground. How many times had the old Squire Trevlyn stood in the selfsame attitude on that same lawn!

There appeared to be no eyes about; the windows were empty; no one saw him, save Mrs. Chattaway, who hid herself amidst the trees, and furtively watched him. She would not have passed him for the world, and she waited until he should be gone. She was unable to divest her mind of a sensation that was akin to the supernatural, as she shrank from this man who bore so wonderful a resemblance in all ways to her father. He, the stranger, did not detect her behind him, and presently he walked across the lawn, ascended the steps, and tried the door.

But the door was fast. The servants would sometimes slip the bolt as a protection against tramps, and they had probably done so to-day. Seizing the bell-handle, the visitor rang such a peal that Sam Atkins, Cris Chattaway's groom, who happened to be in the house and near the door, flew with all speed to open it. Sam had never known Squire Trevlyn; but in this stranger now before him, he could not fail to remark a great general resemblance to the Trevlyn family.

"Is James Chattaway at home?"

To hear the master of the Hold inquired for in that unceremonious manner, rather took Sam back; but he answered that he was at home. He had no need to invite the visitor to walk in, for the visitor had walked in of his own accord. "What name, sir?" demanded Sam, preparing to usher the stranger across the hall.

"Squire Trevlyn."

This concluded Sam Atkins's astonishment. "*What* name, sir, did you say?"

"Squire Trevlyn. Are you deaf, man? Squire Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold."

And the haughty motion of the head, the firm pressure of the lips, might have put a spectator all too unpleasantly in mind of the veritable old Squire Trevlyn, had one who had known him been there to see.

CHAPTER LV.

THE DREAD COME HOME TO MR. CHATTAWAY.

NOTHING could well exceed Mr. Chattaway's astonishment at hearing that George Ryle wished to make Maude Trevlyn his wife. And nothing could exceed his displeasure. Not that Mr. Chattaway had higher views for Maude, or deemed it an undesirable match for her in a pecuniary point of view, as Miss Diana Trevlyn had felt inclined to deem it. Had Maude chosen to marry without any prospect at all, that would not have troubled Mr. Chattaway. But what did trouble Mr. Chattaway was this—that a sister of Rupert Trevlyn should become connected with George Ryle. In Mr. Chattaway's foolish and utterly groundless prejudices, he had suspected, as you may remember, that George Ryle and Rupert had been ever ready to hatch mischief against him; and he dreaded for his own sake any bond of union that might bring them closer together.

There was something else. By some intuitive perception Mr. Chattaway had detected that misplaced liking of his daughter's for George Ryle: and *this* union would not have been unpalatable to Mr. Chattaway. Whatever may have been his ambitious views for his daughter's settlement in life; whatever may have been his dislike to George Ryle, he was willing to forego it all for his own sake. Every consideration was lost sight of in that one which had always reigned paramount with Mr. Chattaway—self-interest. You have not waited until now to learn that James Chattaway was one of the most selfish men on the face of the earth. Some men like, as far as they can, to do their duty to God and to their fellow-creatures; the master of Trevlyn Hold liked to do it only to himself. It had been his motive-spring through life. And what sort of a

garner for the Great Day do you suppose he had been laying up for himself? He was soon to experience a little check here, but that was little, in comparison. The ills that our evil conduct entails upon ourselves here, are as nothing to the dread reckoning that we must render up hereafter.

Mr. Chattaway would have leased the Upland Farm to George Ryle with all the pleasure in life, provided he could have leased his daughter with it. Were George Ryle his veritable son-in-law, then he would not fear any plotting machinations against himself. Somehow, he did fear George Ryle. It was not that Mr. Chattaway feared George as one fears a bad man; no one could fear George Ryle in that way; but Mr. Chattaway feared him as a good one; as a brave, upright, honourable man, who might be tempted to make common cause with the oppressed against the oppressor. It may be, also, that Miss Chattaway did not render herself so universally agreeable in her home as she might have done, for her temper, naturally a bad one, did not improve with years; and for this cause Mr. Chattaway was not sorry that the Hold should be rid of her. Altogether, he contemplated with satisfaction, rather than the contrary, the faint vista presented to his view, of the connection of George Ryle with his family. A vista that hitherto had been of the slighest possible dimensions; one which Mr. Chattaway had not been sure whether he saw or not; but he could not be quite blind to certain predilections shown by Octave, though no hint of it, no allusion to it, had ever been spoken on either side.

And on that first day when George Ryle, after speaking to Mr. Chattaway about the lease of the Upland Farm, said a joking word or two to Miss Diana of his marriage that was to supervene upon it, Octave had overheard. You saw her with her scarlet face of excitement looking over her aunt's shoulder: a face which seemed to frighten George, and caused him to take his leave somewhat abruptly.

Poor Octave Chattaway! George's words, that his coveted wife was a gentlewoman born and bred, and must live as such, had imparted to her a meaning that George himself never gave them. She caught up the notion that *she* was the gentlewoman to whom he alluded—but the notion, as you are aware, was erroneous.

Ere the scarlet had faded from her cheeks, her father had entered the room. Octave bent over the table drawing a pattern. Mr. Chattaway stood at the window, his hands in his

pockets, a habit of his when in thought, and watched George Ryle walking away in the distance.

"He wants the Upland Farm, Octave," Mr. Chattaway presently remarked, without turning round. "He thinks he can get on at it."

Miss Chattaway carried her pencil to the end of the line, and bent her face lower. "I should let it him, papa."

"The Upland Farm will take money, both to stock it and carry it on; no slight sum," remarked Mr. Chattaway.

"Yes. Did he say how he should manage to get it?"

"From Apperley. He will have his work cut out if he is to begin farming on borrowed money; as his father had before him. It is only this very day that he has paid off that debt, contracted so many years ago."

"And no wonder, on the small and poor Trevlyn Farm. The Upland is different. A man would grow rich on the one, and starve on the other.

"The Upland is an extensive farm—the land good. But to take the best farm in the world on borrowed money, would entail uphill work for him. George Ryle will have to work hard; and so must his wife, should he marry one."

Octave paused for a moment, apparently mastering some intricacies in her pattern. "Not his wife; I do not see that. My aunt Maude is a case in point; she has never worked on Trevlyn Farm."

"She has had her cares, though," returned Mr. Chattaway. "And she would have had to work—but for Nora Dickson."

"The Upland Farm could afford a housekeeper if necessary," was Octave's answer.

Not another word was spoken. Mr. Chattaway's suspicions were confirmed, and he determined when George Ryle again asked for the farm lease and for Octave, to accord both with rather more graciousness than he was accustomed to accord anything.

Things did not turn out, however, quite in accordance with his expectations. The best of us are disappointed sometimes, you know. George Ryle pressed very greatly for the farm, but he did not press for Octave. In point of fact, he never mentioned her name, or so much as hinted at any interest he might feel in her; and Mr. Chattaway, rather puzzled and very cross, abstained from promising the farm. He put off the question, very much to George's inconvenience, who set it down to caprice.

But the time came for Mr. Chattaway's eyes to be opened, and he awoke to the cross-purposes which had been at work. On the afternoon of the day mentioned in the last chapter, during the stolen visit of Mrs. Chattaway to Rupert, Mr. Chattaway was undeceived. He had been at home all day, busy over accounts and other business in the steward's room; and Miss Diana, mindful of her promise to George Ryle, to speak a word in his favour relative to the Upland Farm, penetrated to that room for the purpose, deeming it a good opportunity. Mr. Chattaway had been so upset since the receipt of the second letter from Connell and Connell, that she had abstained hitherto from mentioning the subject. Mr. Chattaway was seated at his desk, and he looked up with a start as she abruptly entered: the start of a man who lives in some fear.

"Have you decided about the Upland Farm—whether George Ryle is to have it?" she asked, plunging into the subject without circumlocution, as it was the habit of Miss Diana Trevlyn to do.

"No, not precisely. I shall see in a day or two."

"But you promised him an answer long before this."

"Ah," slightingly spoke Mr. Chattaway. "It's not always convenient to keep one's promises."

"Why are you holding off?"

"Well, for one thing, I thought of retaining that farm in my own hands, and keeping a bailiff to look after it."

"Then you'll burn your fingers, James Chattaway. Those who manage the Upland Farm should live at the Upland Farm. You can't properly manage both places, that and Trevlyn Hold; and you live at Trevlyn Hold. I don't see why you should not let it to George Ryle."

Mr. Chattaway sat biting the end of his pen. Miss Diana waited; but he did not speak, and she resumed.

"I believe he will do well on it. One who has done so much with that small place, Trevlyn Farm, and its not very good land, will not fail to do well on the Upland. Let him have it, Chattaway."

"You speak as if you were interested in his having it," remarked Mr. Chattaway, resentfully.

"I am not sure but I am," equably answered Miss Diana. "I see no reason why you should not let him the farm; for there's no doubt that he will prove a good tenant. He has spoken to me about its involving something more, should he obtain it," she continued, after a pause.

"Ah," said Mr. Chattaway, without surprise. "Well?"

"He wants us to give him Maude."

Mr. Chattaway let fall his pen, and it made a dreadful blot on his account-book, as he turned his head sharply on Miss Diana.

"Maude! You mean Octave."

"Pooh!" cried Miss Diana. "Octave has been spending her years looking after a mare's nest: people who do such foolish things must of necessity encounter disappointment. George Ryle has never cared for her, never cast a thought to her."

Mr. Chattaway's face was turning its disagreeable colour, green; and his lips were drawn as he glared on Miss Trevlyn. "He has been always coming here."

"Yes. For Maude—as it turns out. I confess I never thought of it."

"How do you know this?"

"He has asked for Maude, I tell you. His hopes for years have been fixed upon her."

"He shall never have her," said Mr. Chattaway, emphatically. "He shall never have the Upland Farm."

"It was the decision—with regard to Maude—that crossed me in the first moment. I like *him;* quite well enough to give him Maude, or to give him Octave, had she been the one sought; but I do not consider his position suitable——"

"Suitable! Why, he's a beggar," interrupted Mr. Chattaway, completely losing sight of his own intentions with regard to his daughter. "George Ryle shall smart for this. Give him Maude, indeed!"

"But if Maude's happiness shall be involved in it, what then?" quietly asked Miss Diana.

"Don't be an idiot," was the retort of Mr. Chattaway.

"I never was one yet," said Miss Diana, equably. "But I have nearly made up my mind to give him Maude."

"You cannot do it without my consent. She is under my roof and guardianship, and I tell you that she shall never leave it for that of George Ryle."

"You should bring a little reason to your aid before you speak," returned Miss Diana, with that calm assumption of intellectual superiority which so vexed Mr. Chattaway whenever it peeped out. "What are the true facts? Why, that no living being, neither you nor any one else, can legally prevent Maude from marrying whom she will. You have no power to

prevent it. She and Rupert have never had a legally-appointed guardian, remember. But for the loss of that letter, written at the instance of their mother when she was dying, and which appears to have vanished in so mysterious a manner, *I* should have been their guardian," pointedly concluded Miss Diana. "And might have married Maude as I pleased."

Mr. Chattaway made no reply, except that he nervously bit his lips. If Diana Trevlyn turned against him, all seemed lost. That letter was upon his conscience, then, as he sat; for he it was who had suppressed it.

"And therefore, as in point of fact we have no power whatever vested in us, as Maude might marry whom she chose without consulting us, and as I like George Ryle on his own account, and *she* likes him better than the whole world, I consider that we had better give a willing consent. It will be making a merit of necessity, you see, Chattaway."

Mr. Chattaway saw nothing of the sort; but he dared not too openly defy Miss Trevlyn. "You would marry her to a beggar!" he cried. "To a man who does not possess a shilling! You must have a great regard for her!"

"Maude has no money, you know."

"I do know it. And that is all the more reason why her husband should possess some."

"They will get along, Chattaway, at the Upland Farm."

"I dare say they will—when they get it. I shall not lease the Upland Farm to a man who has to borrow money to go into it."

"I might be brought to obviate that difficulty," rejoined Miss Diana, in her coldest and hardest manner, as she gazed full at Mr. Chattaway. "Since I learnt that their mother left the children to me, I have felt a sort of proprietary right in them, and shall perhaps hand over to Maude, when she leaves us, sufficient money to stock the Upland Farm. The half at least of what I possess will some time be hers."

Was *this* the result of his having suppressed that dying mother's letter? Be you very sure, Mr. Chattaway, that such dealings can never prosper! So long as there is a just and good God above us, they can but bring their proper recompense.

Mr. Chattaway did not trust himself to reply. He drew a sheet of paper towards him, and dashed off a few lines upon it. It was a peremptory refusal to lease the Upland Farm to George Ryle. Folding it, he placed it in an envelope directed it and rang the bell.

"What's that?" asked Miss Diana.

"My reply to Ryle. He shall never rent the Upland Farm."

In Mr. Chattaway's impatience, he did not give time for the bell to be answered, but opened the door and shouted. It was no one's business in particular to answer that bell; and Sam Atkins, who was in the kitchen, waiting for orders from Cris, ran forward at the sound of Mr. Chattaway's call.

"Take this letter down to Trevlyn Farm instantly," was the command of Mr. Chattaway. "Instantly, do you hear?"

But in the very act of the groom's taking it from Mr. Chattaway's hand, there came that violent ring at the hall-door of which you have heard. Sam Atkins, thinking possibly the Hold might be on fire, as the ricks had been not so long ago, flew to open it, though it was not his place to do so.

And Mr. Chattaway, disturbed by the loud and imperative ring, stood where he was, and looked and listened. He saw the entrance of the stranger, and heard the colloquy; heard the announcement of the name: "Squire Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold."

Miss Diana Trevlyn heard it, and came forth, and they stood like two living petrifactions, gazing at the apparition. Miss Diana, strong-minded woman that she was, did think for the moment that she saw her father. But her senses came to her, and she walked slowly forward to meet him.

"You must be my brother, Rupert Trevlyn!—risen from the dead."

"I am; but not risen from the dead," he answered, taking the hands she held out. "Which of them are you? Maude?"

"No; Diana. Oh, Rupert! I thought it was my father."

It was indeed him whom they had for so many years believed to be dead; the runaway, Rupert Trevlyn. He had come home to claim his own; come home in his true character: Squire Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold.

But Mr. Chattaway, in his worse and wildest dreams, had never bargained for this!

CHAPTER LVI.

DOUBTS CLEARED AT LAST.

MANY a painting has been handed down to posterity whose features bore not a tithe of the interest that was presented at that moment in the old hall of the Trevlyns. The fine figure of the stranger, standing with the air of a chieftain, of a master, of one who is conscious of his own power of right; the keen gaze of Miss Diana, regarding him with puzzled equanimity; the gradual backing of the servant, as one scared, who will not leave the scene, and yet scarcely dares stay in it; and the slow horror of conviction that was rising to the face of Mr. Chattaway. And there, behind all, stealing into the hall by a side-door, came the timid steps, the pale questioning looks of Mrs. Chattaway, not certain yet whether the intruder was an earthly or a ghostly visitor.

Mr. Chattaway was the first to recover himself. He looked at the stranger with a face that strove to be a haughty one: he would have given the whole world to possess the calm equanimity of the Trevlyns, the unchanged countenance of Miss Diana; but his leaden face wore its worst and greenest tinge, and his lips had a quiver in them as he spoke—and he was conscious of it.

"*Whom* do you say you are? Squire Trevlyn? He has been in his grave long ago. We do not tolerate impostors here."

"I hope you do not," was the reply of the stranger, turning his face full on the speaker. "*I* will not in future, I can tell you that. True, James Chattaway: one Squire Trevlyn is in his grave; but he lives again in me. I am Rupert Trevlyn, and the Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

Yes, it was Rupert Trevlyn. The young Rupert Trevlyn of the old days; the runaway heir. He, whom they had so long mourned as dead (though perhaps there had not been much mourning in it), never had been dead, and now had come home, after all these years, to claim his own.

Mr. Chattaway backed against the wall, and stood there staring with his livid face. To contend was impossible. To affect to believe that it was not Rupert Trevlyn and the true heir, the next in legal succession to his father, the old Squire

would have been utter child's play. The well-remembered features of Rupert, the heir, grew upon his memory one by one. Putting aside that speaking likeness to the Squire, to the Trevlyns generally, Mr. Chattaway, now that the first moments of surprise were over, would have recognized him himself. He needed not the acknowledgment of Miss Diana, the sudden recognition of his wife, who darted forward, uttering her brother's name, and fell sobbing in his arms, to convince him that it was indeed Rupert Trevlyn, the indisputable master from henceforth of Trevlyn Hold.

He leaned against the wall, and took in all the despair of his position. The latent fear, nay, the conviction, so long seated in his heart, that he would some time lose Trevlyn Hold, had never pointed to *this*. Mr. Chattaway, in some far-away corner of his mind, had looked vaguely forward to lawsuits and contentions between him and its claimant, poor Rupert, son of Joe. He had surmised that the lawsuits might last for years, he meanwhile keeping possession, perhaps up to the end. He had never expected to have it suddenly wrested from him by indisputable and lawful right; he had never believed that he himself was the usurper; that a nearer heir, and a direct one, the Squire's son, was in existence. Poor Rupert, whom he had plotted against, had never yet been the heir. Joe Trevlyn, the dead, had never been the heir. Rupert, the elder son, had been all the time in existence. He had now come, not as a claimant, not as the heir, but as the master; and he, Chattaway, could not gainsay it. The Squire's will, leaving Trevlyn Hold to his eldest son, had never been cancelled. The codicil gave it to Chattaway only in the event of his death and his brother Joe's. Chattaway only came in *after* them.

There is an old adage to the effect that misfortune never comes from the quarter in which it is looked for. Most certainly Mr. Chattaway had never looked for it from this. He had dreaded, as you know, poor Rupert; he had cast impossible doubts on the will of Squire Trevlyn; he was not sure, but a vague thought had been sometimes upon him that, some time or other, public feeling would so rise against him as to force him to abdicate in favour of Rupert; but never, in his wildest imaginings, had he cast a thought to the possibility of the direct owner, Rupert Trevlyn, being alive. He had believed him as certainly dead as the old Squire whom he had seen nailed down in his coffin.

And this was the explanation of the letters from Connell,

Connell, and Ray, which had so annoyed Mr. Chattaway and puzzled his wife. "Rupert Trevlyn was about to take up his own again—as Squire of Trevlyn Hold." True; but it was this Rupert Trevlyn, not that. It may be that Mr. Chattaway's harsh feeling towards poor Rupert, the dependant, was somewhat softened by the thought of how powerless he had been to work him any harm in his possessions—as powerless as he himself now was to work harm to the returned fugitive, henceforth the legal owner of Trevlyn.

The explanation he might have entered into, that returned man, is of little moment to us; the bare fact is sufficient—that he had come, in life. It was an explanation he gave but partially to those around, descending to no details. It was true that he had been shipwrecked at the time of his supposed death, and he knew that an account of his death had been sent home. Why he had suffered it to remain uncontradicted he did not explain; and they could only surmise that the crime in which he had been a suspected sharer tied his tongue. However innocent he knew himself to be, whilst others at home believed him guilty he was not safe, and he had never known until recently that his reputation had been cleared. So much he did say. He had been half over the world, he said, but had lived chiefly in South America, where he had made a handsome fortune.

"And whose children are these?" he asked, as he passed into the drawing-room, where the sea of wondering faces was turned upon him. "*You* should be James Chattaway's daughter," he cried, singling out Octave, "for you have the face of your father over again."

"I am Miss Chattaway," she repellently answered, drawing from him with a scornful gesture. "Papa," she whispered, going up to the cowed, shrinking figure, who had followed in the wake of the rest, "who is that man?"

"Hush, Octave! He has come to turn us out of our home."

Octave gazed as one suddenly blinded. She saw the strange likeness to the Trevlyns, and it flashed into her mind that it must be the Uncle Rupert, risen from the supposed dead, of whom she had heard so much. She saw him notice her two sisters; she saw him turn to Maude, lift her face with his hands, and gaze on it.

"You should be a Trevlyn. A softer and fairer face than Joe's, but the same outlines. What is your name, my dear?"

"Maude Trevlyn, sir."

"Ay. Joe's child. Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"One brother."

Squire Trevlyn—we must give him his title henceforth—looked round the room, as if in search of the brother. "Where is he?"

Maude shivered; but he waited for an answer, and she gave it. "He is not here, sir."

"And now tell me a little of bygones," he cried, wheeling round on his sister Diana. "Who is the reigning master of Trevlyn Hold?"

She indicated Mr. Chattaway with her finger. "He is."

"He! Who succeeded my father—in my place?"

"He did. Mr. Chattaway."

"Then where was Joe?"

"Joe was dead. He had died a few months previously."

"Leaving—how many children did you say—Two?"

"Two—Maude and Rupert."

"The latter still an infant, I presume, at the time of my father's death?"

"Quite an infant."

"Nevertheless, he was the Squire of Trevlyn Hold, failing me. Why did he not succeed?"

There came no answer. He looked at them all in succession: but even Miss Diana Trevlyn's undisturbable equanimity was shaken for the moment. It was Mr. Chattaway who plucked up courage to reply, and he put on as bold a front as he could.

"Squire Trevlyn judged it well to will the estate to me. What would a child in long petticoats do, reigning at Trevlyn Hold?"

"He might have reigned by deputy. Where is Rupert? I must see him?"

But had they been keen observers they might have detected that Squire Trevlyn put the questions not altogether with the tone of a man who seeks information through ignorance. In point of fact he was as wise as they were as to the principal events which had followed on the Squire's death. He had remained in London two or three weeks since landing; had gathered all the information that could be afforded him by Connell and Connell, and had himself dictated the letters which had so upset Mr. Chattaway; more than that, he had, this very morning, halted at Barmester, on his way to Trevlyn Hold, had seen Mr. Peterby, and gleaned many details. One

thing Mr. Peterby had not been able to tell him, whether the unfortunate Rupert was living or dead.

"Where is Maude?" he suddenly asked.

Maude stepped forward, somewhat surprised.

"Not you, child. One who must be thirty good years older than you. My sister, Maude Trevlyn."

"She married Thomas Ryle, of the Farm, Rupert," answered Miss Diana, who had rapidly determined to be the best of friends with her brother. "It was not a proper match for her, and she entered upon it without our consent; nay, in defiance of us all. She lives there still; and—and—here—she—is!"

For once in her life Miss Diana was startled into betraying surprise. There, coming in at the door, was her sister Maude, Mrs. Ryle; and she had not been at Trevlyn Hold for years and years.

Nora, keen-witted Nora, had fathomed the mystery as she walked home. That one, so strangely resembling old Squire Trevlyn, must be very closely connected with him, she doubted not, and she worked out the problem. It must be Rupert Trevlyn, come (may it not be said?) to life again. Before she entered, his features had been traced on her memory, and she hastened to acquaint Mrs. Ryle.

That lady lost no time in speeding to the Hold. George accompanied her. There was no agitation on her face; it was a true Trevlyn's in its calm impassivity, but she greeted her brother with words of welcome.

"I have not been in this house, Rupert, my brother, since its master died; I would not enter it while a usurper reigned in it. Thank Heaven, you are come. It will end all heart-burnings."

"Heart-burnings? of what nature are they? But who are you?" he broke off, looking at George. And then he raised his hand to lay it on his shoulder, and gazed into his face. "Unless I am mistaken, you are your father's son."

George laughed at his quaintness. "My father's son, I believe, sir, and people tell me I am like him; but yet more like my mother. I am George Berkeley Ryle."

"Is he here?—with you? I and Tom Ryle were good friends once."

"Here!" uttered George, with emotion that he could not wholly suppress. "He has been dead for many years. He was killed."

Squire Trevlyn lifted his hands. "It will all come out to

me bit by bit, I suppose: one record of the past, one calamity, after another. Maude"—turning to his sister—"I was inquiring of the past. If the Trevlyns have held a name for nothing else in the county, they have held one for justice; and I want to know how it was that my father—my father and yours—willed away his estate from poor Joe's boy. Good Heavens, Maude," he abruptly broke off, as he caught sight of her face in the red light of the declining sun, "how wonderfully you have grown like my father! More so even than I have!"

It was so. As Mrs. Ryle stood there, haughty, self-possessed, they might have deemed it the old Squire over again. "You want to know why my father willed away his estate from Joe's son?" she said. "Ask Chattaway; ask Diana Trevlyn," with a sweep of the hand to both. "Ask them to tell you who kept it from him that a son was born to Joe. *They* did. The Squire made his will, went to his grave, never knowing that young Rupert was born. Ask them to tell you how it was that, when in accordance with this ignorance the will was made, my father constituted his second daughter's husband his heir, instead of my husband; mine, his eldest daughter's. Ask it them, Rupert."

"Heart-burnings? Yes, I can understand that there have been heart-burnings," murmured Squire Trevelyn.

"Ask *him*—Chattaway—about the two thousand pounds debt to Mr. Ryle," she continued, never flinching from her stern gaze, never raising her voice above its calm tones of low, concentrated indignation. "You have just said that you and Tom Ryle were friends, Rupert. Yes, you were friends; and had you reigned after my father, he, my husband, would not have been hunted to his death."

"Maude! What are you saying?"

"The truth. Wherever that man Chattaway could lay his hand of oppression, he has laid it. He pursued my husband incessantly during his life; it was through that pursuit—inadvertently, I admit—that he met his death. The debt of two thousand pounds, money which had been lent to Mr. Ryle, he, my father, cancelled on his death-bed; he made my husband a present of it; he would have handed him the bond then and there, but it was in Chattaway's possession, and he said he would send it to him. It never was sent, Rupert; and the first use Chattaway made of his new power when he came into the Hold, was to threaten to sue my husband upon

the bond. The Squire had given my husband his word to renew the lease on the same terms, and *you* know that his word was never gone from. The second thing Chattaway did was to raise the rent. It has been nothing but uphill work with us."

"I'll right it now, Maude," he cried, with all the generous impulse of the Trevlyns. "I'll right that, and all else."

"We have righted it for ourselves," she answered proudly. "By dint of perseverance, and hard work, not on my part, but on *his*"—pointing to George—"we have paid it off. Not many days ago, the last instalment of the debt and interest was handed to Chattaway. May it do him good! *I* should not like to grow rich upon unjust gains."

"But where is Rupert?" repeated Squire Trevlyn. "I must see Rupert."

Ah, there was no help for it, and the whole tale was poured into his ear. Between Mrs. Ryle's revelations on the one side, and Chattaway's denials on the other, it was all poured into the indignant but perhaps not surprised ear of the new master of Trevlyn. The unkindness and oppression dealt out to Rupert through his unhappy life, its terrible ending of the burning of the rick, of the strange disappearance of Rupert. He gave no token that he had heard it all before. Mrs. Ryle spared nothing. She told him of the suspicion so freely dealt out by the neighbourhood that Chattaway had made away with Rupert. Even then the Squire returned no sign that he knew of the suspicion as well as they did.

"Maude," he said, "where is Rupert? Diana, *you* answer me—where is Rupert?"

They were unable to answer. They could only say that he was absent, and they knew not how or where.

It may be that Squire Trevlyn feared the suspicion might be too true a one; for he turned suddenly on James Chattaway, his eye flashing with a severe light

"Tell me where the boy is."

"I don't know where he is," said Mr. Chattaway.

"He may be dead!"

"He may—for all I can tell to the contrary."

Squire Trevlyn paused. "Rupert Trevlyn is my heir," he slowly said, "and I will have him found. James Chattaway, I insist on your producing Rupert."

"Nobody can insist upon an impossibility."

"Then listen. You don't know much of me, but you knew

my father; and you may remember that when he *willed* a thing, he did it: that same spirit is mine. Now I register a vow that if you do not produce Rupert Trevlyn, or tell me where I may find him, dead or alive, I will publicly charge you with the murder."

"I have as much cause to charge you with it, as you have to charge me," returned Mr. Chattaway, his anger rising. "You have heard them tell you of my encounter with Rupert on the evening following the examination before the magistrates. I declare on my sacred word of honour——"

"*Your* word of honour!" scornfully apostrophized Mrs. Ryle.

"That I have never seen Rupert Trevlyn since the moment when I left him on the ground," he continued, turning his dark looks on Mrs. Ryle, but never pausing. "I have sought in vain for him since; the police have sought; and he is not to be found."

"Very well," said the Squire. "I have given you the alternative."

Mr. Chattaway opened his mouth to reply; but to the surprise of all who knew him, suddenly closed it again, and left the room. To describe the trouble that the man was in would be impossible. Apart from the general perplexity brought to him by this awful arrival of a master for Trevlyn Hold, there was the minor doubt as to what should be his own conduct. Should it be abject submission? or war to the knife? Mr. Chattaway's temper would have inclined him decidedly to the latter course; but he feared it might be bad policy for his self-interest; and self-interest had always been paramount with James Chattaway. Should he dispute for Trevlyn Hold with this new-comer? or should he submissively yield? He stood outside the house, where he had wandered, and cast his eyes on the fine old place, on the fair domain stretching around. Right in face of him was the rick-yard, which had given rise to so much discomfort, trouble, and ill-feeling. Oh, if he could only dispute it successfully, and retain possession of it! But there lay a conviction in his heart, that even to attempt such would be the height of folly. That he, thus returned, was really the true Rupert Trevlyn, who had decamped in his youth, now grown into a middle-aged man, was apparent as the sun at noon-day. It was clearly apparent to him, Mr. Chattaway: it would be apparent to the world. The returned wanderer had remarked that his identity would be established

by indisputable proof; but Mr. Chattaway felt that there was no proof necessary to establish it. What, then, would be the use of his holding out? And yet! to quit this fine possession, to sink into poverty and obscurity in the face and eyes of the local world—that world which had been ready enough, as it was, to cast its contempt on the master of Trevlyn Hold—would be as the very bitterest fate that ever fell upon man. In that cruel moment, when it was pressing upon his imagination with fearfully vivid colours, it seemed that death would be as a boon in comparison.

While he was thus standing, torn with contending emotions, Cris ran up in excitement from the direction of the stables. He had been leaving his horse there on his return from Blackstone, and some vague and confused version of the affair had been told to him. "What's this, father?" he asked, in demonstrative anger. "They are saying that Rupert Trevlyn has come boldly back, and is laying claim to the Hold. Have you given him into custody?"

Mr. Chattaway raised his dull eyes. The question only added to his misery. "Yes, Rupert Trevlyn has come back," he said; "but——"

"Is he in custody?" impatiently interrupted Cris. "Are the police here?"

"It is another Rupert Trevlyn, Cris; not that one."

Something in his father's manner, more than the words, struck unpleasantly on the senses of Cris Chattaway, subduing him considerably. "Another Rupert Trevlyn!" he repeated, in a hesitating tone. "What are you saying?"

"The Rupert Trevlyn of old; the Squire's runagate son; the heir," said Mr. Chattaway, as if it were a comfort to tell out all the bitter truth. "He has come back to claim his own, Cris—Trevlyn Hold."

And Mr. Cris fell against the wall, side by side with his father, and stared in dismayed consternation. "Come back to claim his own!" he mechanically repeated. "Come back to claim Trevlyn Hold!"

CHAPTER LVII.

A VISIT TO RUPERT.

And what were the emotions of Mrs. Chattaway? They were of a mixed nature. In spite of the slight comfort which possession of the Hold had brought herself individually; in spite of the feeling of usurpation, of *wrong*, which had ever rested unpleasantly upon her; she would have been superior to frail human nature, had not a sense of dismay struck upon her at its being thus suddenly wrested from them. She knew not what her husband's means might be; whether he had anything or nothing, by saving or otherwise, that he could call his own, apart from the revenues of the Hold: but she did know enough to be sure that it could not be a tithe enough to keep them; and where were they to go with their helpless daughters? That these unpleasant considerations floated through her mind in a vague, confused vision was true; but far above them came a rush of thought, of care, closer to the present hour. Her brother had said—and there was a determination not to be mistaken in his tone—that unless Mr. Chattaway produced Rupert Trevlyn, he should publicly charge him with the murder. Nothing but the strongest control exercised upon herself could have restrained Mrs. Chattaway from starting forward and avowing all, when she heard this. Mr. Chattaway was a man not held in the world's favour, but he was her husband; and in her eyes his faults and failings had ever appeared in a venial light. She would have given much to stand out and say, "You are accusing my husband wrongfully; Rupert is alive, and I am concealing him."

But she did not dare to do this. That very husband would have replied, "Then I order Rupert into custody—how dared you conceal him?" She took an opportunity of whispering a question to George Ryle of the meaning of the warning he had despatched to her by Nora. George himself could not explain it. He had met Bowen accidentally, and the officer had told him in confidence that they had received a mysterious hint that Rupert Trevlyn was not far off—hence George's warning to Mrs. Chattaway. It was to turn out that the *other* Rupert Trevlyn had been spoken of: but neither Bowen nor George knew this.

George Ryle, sound of judgment, clear of perception, rapidly drew his own conclusion from this return of Squire Trevlyn: it would be the preservation of Rupert; it was the very best thing that could have happened for him. It may be said, the only thing. The tether had been lengthened out to its extreme limits, and to keep him much longer where he was, in concealment, would be an impossibility: or, if they so kept him, it would be his death. George Ryle saw that a powerful protector for Rupert might arise in Squire Trevlyn.

"He must be told the truth," he whispered to Mrs. Chattaway.

"Yes, perhaps it may be better," she answered. "But I dare not tell him. Will you undertake it, feeling your ground as you go on?"

He nodded, and began to wonder what excuse he could invent for seeking a private conference with the newly-returned Squire. But while he plotted and planned, Maude rendered it unnecessary.

By a tacit idea of the fitness of things, the state-rooms at the Hold, generally kept for visitors, were assigned by Miss Diana to her brother. He was shown to them, and was in the act of gazing from the window at the well-remembered features of the old domain, when there stole in upon him one, white and tearless, but with a terrified imploring despair in her countenance, if he ever saw despair.

"Maude, my child, what is it? I like your face, my dear, and I must have you henceforth for my very own child?"

"Not me, Uncle Rupert; never mind me," she said, the loving tone telling upon her breaking heart and bringing forth a gush of tears. "If you will only love my brother Rupert!—if you will only get Mr. Chattaway to pardon him!"

"But he may be dead, child."

"Uncle Rupert, if he were not dead—if you found him now—to-day," she reiterated, gazing up through her blinding tears—"would *you* deliver him up to justice? Oh, Uncle Rupert, don't blame him; don't visit it upon him! It was the Trevlyn temper, and Mr. Chattaway should not have provoked it by beating him."

"*I* blame him! *I* deliver a Trevlyn up to justice!" echoed Squire Trevlyn, with a threatening touch of the Trevlyn temper at that very moment. "What are you saying, child? If Rupert is in life, he shall have his wrongs righted from henceforth. Rubbish as to the cost of a burnt rick! The ricks were mine,

in point of fact, not Chattaway's. Rupert Trevlyn is my heir, and shall be recognized and received as such."

She sank down before him and laid her head upon his knees, crying softly with the relief his words brought to her. Squire Trevlyn placed his hand on her pretty hair, caressingly. "Don't grieve so, child; he may not be dead. I'll find him if he is to be found. I'll look up the police. They shall know they have a Squire Trevlyn amongst them again."

"Uncle Rupert"—and she locked her trembling fingers nervously within his as she spoke, and lifted her wet eyes to his face—"I can tell you where Rupert is. He is very near; lying in concealment—lying ill—almost dying. We have not dared to tell of it, and the secret is nearly killing us."

He listened in amazement, he questioned her until he gathered the comprehensive facts, not yet the details. "Who has known of this, do you say?"

"My aunt Edith, and I, and the doctor; and—and—George Ryle."

The consciousness with which the last name was brought out, the sudden blush on the downcast cheeks, whispered a tale to Squire Trevlyn.

"Halloa, Miss Maude! I read a secret. *That* will not do, you know. I cannot spare you from the Hold for all the George Ryles in the world. You must be its mistress."

"My aunt Diana will be that," murmured Maude, with a hidden face.

"That she never shall while I am its master," was the rejoinder, spoken emphatically. "If Diana could look quietly on and see her father deceived, or help to deceive him; see Chattaway usurp the Hold to the exclusion of Joe's son, and join in the wickedness; she has forfeited all claim in courtesy to it: she shall neither reign in it nor reside in it. No, my little Maude, you must live with me, the mistress of Trevlyn Hold."

Maude's tears were flowing in silence. She kept her head down.

"What is George Ryle to you?" somewhat sternly asked Squire Trevlyn. "Do you love him?"

"I had no one else to love: they were not kind to me—except my aunt Edith," was her murmured answer.

He sat playing with her hair as it lay on his knee, his head bent in thought. "Is he a good man, Maude? Upright—honourable—just?"

"That, and more," she softly whispered.

"And I suppose you love him? Would it quite break your heart, now, were I to issue my edict that you should never have him; to say you must turn him over to Octave Chattaway?"

It was only a random word. Maude took it differently, and she lifted for a moment her glowing face. "But he does not like Octave! It is Octave who likes——"

She had spoken in impulse, and now that recollection came to her she faltered. Squire Trevlyn, undignified as it was, broke into a subdued, prolonged whistle.

"I see, young lady. And so, Mr. George has had the taste to like some one better than Octave. Well, perhaps I should do so, in his place."

"But about Rupert?" she pleaded.

"Ah, about Rupert. I must go at once and see him. Mark Canham stared at me as I came through the gate just now, as one scared out of his wits. He must have been puzzled by the likeness."

Squire Trevlyn went down to the hall, and was putting on his hat when they came flocking around, asking whether he was going out, offering to accompany him, Diana requesting him to wait whilst she put on her bonnet. But he waved them off: he would prefer to stroll out alone, he said; he might look in and have a talk with some of his father's old dependants—if any of them were left.

George Ryle was standing outside, deliberating upon how he should convey the communication, little thinking that it had already been done. Squire Trevlyn came up, and passed his arm within his.

"I am going to the lodge," he remarked. "You may know why, and whom I want to see there?"

"You have heard, then!" exclaimed George.

"Yes. From Maude. By-the-by, Mr. George, what secret understanding is there between you and that young lady?"

George looked surprised; but he was not one to lose his equanimity. "It is no longer a secret, sir. I have confided it to Miss Diana. If Mr. Chattaway will grant me the lease of a farm that I want, I shall speak to him."

"Mr. Chattaway! The farms don't belong to him now, but to me."

George laughed. "Yes, I forgot. I must come to you for it, sir. I want to take the Upland."

"And you would like to take Maude with it?"

"Oh yes! I must take her with it."

"Softly, sir. Maude belongs to me, just as the farms do: and I can tell you for your consolation, and you must make the best of it, that I cannot spare her from the Hold. There; that's enough. I have not come home to have my will disputed: I am a true Trevlyn."

A somewhat uncomfortable silence ensued, and lasted until they reached the lodge. Squire Trevlyn entered it without ceremony. Old Mark, who was sitting before the hearth apparently in deep thought, turned his head, saw who was coming in, rose as quickly as his rheumatism allowed him, and stared as if he saw an apparition.

"Do you know me, Mark?"

"To my dazed eyes it looks like the Squire," was Mark's answer, slowly shaking his head, after the manner of one thunderstruck. "But I know that it canna be. I stood at these gates as he was carried out to his last home i' the churchyard at Barbrook. The Squire was older, too."

"The Squire left a son, Mark."

"No!" burst forth the old man, after a pause, as the light flashed upon him. "Sir—sir! You can surely never be the young heir, Mr. Rupert, that we have all mourned for as dead?"

"Do you remember the young heir's features, Mark?"

"Ay, I have never forgot 'em, sir."

"Then look at mine."

There was doubt no longer; and Mark Canham, in his enthusiastic joy, attempted to kneel, forgetting his rheumatism. He brought himself up with a groan. "I be fit for nothing now but to nurse my rheumatiz, sir. And you be the true Rupert Trevlyn! You'll be the Squire from henceforth? Oh, sir, say it!"

"I am the Squire, Mark," was the answer. "But I came here to see another Rupert Trevlyn—he who will be the Squire after me."

Old Mark shook his head. He glanced towards the staircase as he spoke, and dropped his voice to a whisper, as if fearing that it might penetrate to one who was lying there.

"If he don't get better soon, sir, he'll never live to be the Squire. He's very ill. Circumstances have been agin' him, it can't be denied; but maybe it was in his constitution from the first to go off, as his father, poor Mr. Joe, went off afore him."

"Nonsense," said the Squire. "We'll get him well again!"

"And what of Chattaway?" asked old Canham. "He'll never forego his vengeance, sir. I have been in mortal fear ever since Master Rupert have been lying here. The fear had some'at o' selfishness in it, maybe," he added, ingenuously; "for Chattaway, he'd turn me right off, without a minute's warning, happen he come to know of it. He have never liked my being at the lodge at all, sir; he'd ha' sent me away times and again but for Miss Diana."

"Ah," said the Squire. "Well, it does not rest with him now. What has he allowed you, Mark?"

"Half-a-crown a week, sir."

"Half-a-crown a week?" repeated Squire Trevlyn, his mouth curling with displeasure. "How have you lived?"

"It haven't been but a poor live at best, sir," was the simple answer. "Ann, she works hard, at home or out, but she don't earn much. Her eyes be bad, sir; happen you may call to mind as they was always weak and ailing. The Squire he fixed my pay here at five shillings a week, and Chattaway changed it when he come into power. Miss Diana's good to us; but for her and the bit o' money Ann can earn, I don't see as we could ha' got along at all."

"Would you like the half-crown changed back again to five shillings, Mark?"

"I should think it was fortin come to me right off, Squire."

"Then you may reckon that it has come from this day."

He moved to the staircase as he spoke, leaving the old man in an ecstasy of delight. Ann Canham, who had shrunk away into hiding, came forward. Her father turned to her triumphantly.

"Didn't I tell ye it was the Squire? And you to go on at me, saying I was gone clean off my wits to think it! I know'd it was no other."

"But you said it was the dead Squire, father," was poor Ann's meek response.

"It's all the same," cried old Canham. "There'll be a Trevlyn at the Hold again; and our five shillings a week is to come back to us. Bless the Trevlyns! they was always open-handed."

"Father, what a dreadful come-down for Chattaway! What will he do? He'll have to turn out."

"Serve him right!" shouted Mark. "How many homes have he made empty in his time! Ann, girl, I have kep' my eyes a bit open through life, in spite of having the limbs

cramped with rheumatiz, and I never failed to notice one thing—them who are fond o' making others' homes desolate, generally finds their own desolate afore they die. Law me! Folks talk o' 'venging themselves agin the oppressor! Let 'em leave their cause in God's hands. He won't forget. Chattaway'll get a taste now of what he have been so fond o' dealing out to others—hardship. I hope the bells 'll ring the day he turns out o' the Hold!"

"But Madam will have to turn out with him!" meekly suggested Ann Canham.

It took Mark back. He liked Madam as much as he disliked her husband. "Happen something 'll be thought of for Madam," said he. "Maybe the new Squire 'll keep her with him at the Hold."

George Ryle had gone upstairs, and prepared the wondering Rupert for the appearance of his uncle. As the latter entered, his tall head bowing, his portly form making the stairs creak, he halted in dismay. Nay, in a variety of feelings; but dismay was perhaps the most prominent. In the fair face bent towards him from the bed, the large blue eyes, the bright, falling hair, he believed for the moment he saw the beloved brother Joe of his youth. But in the hollow cheeks with their hectic, the drawn face, the parched and fevered lips, the ghastly hands, the attenuated frame, he read too surely the marks of the disease which had taken off that brother, the death Mark Canham had hinted at; and a conviction seated itself in the Squire's mind that he must look elsewhere for the heir to Trevlyn.

"My poor boy! Joe's boy! It is this place that is killing you!"

"No, Uncle Rupert, it is not that at all. It is the fear."

Squire Trevlyn could not breathe. He looked up to the one pane, and pushed it open with his stick. The cold air came in, and he seemed relieved, drawing a long breath. But the same current that was grateful to him, found its way to the lungs of Rupert, and he began to cough violently. "It is the draught," panted the poor invalid.

George Ryle closed the pane again, and the Squire bent over the bed. "We must have you to the Hold at once, Rupert."

The hectic faded on Rupert's face. "It is not possible," he answered. "Mr. Chattaway would denounce me."

"Denounce you!" hotly repeated Squire Trevlyn. "De-

nounce my nephew and my brother Joe's son! He had better let me see him attempt it."

In the impulse, characteristic of the Trevlyns, the Squire turned to descend the stairs. He was going to have Rupert brought home at once. George Ryle followed him, and arrested him in the avenue.

"Pardon me, Squire Trevlyn. You must first of all make sure of Chattaway—that he will be harmless. I am not clear also but you must make sure of the police."

"What do you mean?"

"The police have the matter in hand. *Can* they relinquish it, even for you?"

They stood gazing at each other in doubt and discomfort. It was an unpleasant phase of the affair; and one which had certainly not until that moment presented itself to Squire Trevlyn's view.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A CONVERSATION WITH MR. CHATTAWAY.

THEY stood together, deep in dispute—Squire Trevlyn of the Hold, and he who had so long reigned at the Hold, its usurper. In that very rick-yard which had recently played so prominent a part in the career of the unhappy Rupert, stood they: the Squire—bold, towering, haughty; Chattaway—cowardly, shrinking, indecisive.

It was of that very Rupert they were talking. Squire Trevlyn hastened home from the lodge, and found Chattaway in the rick-yard: he urged upon him the claims of Rupert for forgiveness, for immunity from the consequences of his crime; he urged upon him its *necessity;* for a Trevlyn, he said, must not be disgraced. And Mr. Chattaway appeared to be turning obstinate; to say that he never would forgive him or release him from its consequences. He pointed to the blackened spots, scarcely yet cleared of their *débris.* "Is a crime like that to be pardoned?" he asked.

"What caused the crime? Who drove him to it?" And Mr. Chattaway had no plausible answer at hand.

"When you married into the Trevlyn family, you (as may be said) married into its faults," resumed the Squire. "At any

rate, you became fully acquainted with them. You knew as much of that failing, the Trevlyn temper, as we ourselves know. I ask you, then, how could you be so unwise—to put the question moderately—as to provoke it in Rupert?"

"Evil tempers can be subdued," returned Mr. Chattaway. "And ought to be."

"Just so. They can be, and they ought to be. But unfortunately we don't all of us do as we can and ought. Do you? I have heard say in the old days that James Chattaway's spirit was a sullen one: have you subdued its sullenness?"

"I wish you'd not wander from the point, Mr. Trevlyn."

"I am keeping pretty near to the point. But I can go nearer to it, if you please. How could you, James Chattaway, dare to horsewhip a Trevlyn? Your wife's nephew, and her brother's son! Whatever might be the provocation—but, so far as I can learn, there was no just provocation—how came you so far to forget yourself and your temper as to strike him? One, possessing the tamest spirit ever put into man, might be expected to turn at the cruel insult you inflicted on Rupert. Did you do it with the intention of calling up the Trevlyn temper?"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Chattaway.

"It will not do to say nonsense to me. The setting on fire of the rick was your fault, not his; the crime was led to by you; and I, the actual owner of those ricks, shall hold you responsible for it. Yes, James Chattaway, those ricks were mine; you need not disclaim what I say; the ricks were mine then, as they are now. They have been mine, in point of fact, ever since my father's death. You may rely upon one thing—that had I known the injustice that was being enacted, I should have returned long ago."

"Injustice!" cried Mr. Chattaway. "What injustice?"

"What injustice! Heart alive, man, has there been anything *but* injustice? When my father's breath went out of his body, his legitimate successor (in my absence and supposed death) was his grandson Rupert; this very Rupert whom you have been goading on to ill, perhaps to death. Had my brother Joe lived, would you have allowed *him* to succeed, pray?"

"But your brother Joe did not live; he was dead."

"You evade the question."

"It is a question that will answer no end if replied to," cried Mr. Chattaway, biting his thin lips, and feeling very like a man

who is being driven to bay. "Of course he would have succeeded. But he was dead, and Squire Trevlyn chose to make his will in my favour, and appoint me his successor."

"Beguiled to it by treachery. He was suffered to go to his grave never knowing that a grandson, a direct heir, was born to him. James Chattaway, were I guilty of the like treachery, I could not rest in my bed. I should dread that the anger of God would be ever coming down upon me."

"The Squire did well," growled Mr. Chattaway. "What would an infant have done with Trevlyn Hold?"

"Granted for a single moment, for the sake of argument, that it had been inexpedient to leave Trevlyn Hold to an infant, it was not to you it should have been left. If Squire Trevlyn must have bequeathed it to a son-in-law, it should have been to him who was the husband of his eldest daughter, Thomas Ryle."

"Thomas Ryle!" contemptuously ejaculated Mr. Chattaway. "A poor, hard-working farmer——"

"Don't attempt to disparage Thomas Ryle to me, sir," thundered the Squire; and the voice, the look, the rising anger were so like the old Squire of the days gone by, that Mr. Chattaway positively recoiled. "Thomas Ryle was a good and honourable man, respected by all; he was a gentleman by birth and breeding; he was a gentleman in mind and manners—and that could never be said of you, James Chattaway. Work! To be sure he worked; and so did his father. They had to work to live. Their farm was a poor one; and extra labour had to be bestowed on it to compensate for the money which ought to have been spent upon it, but which they had not got to spend, for their patrimony had dwindled away. They might have taken a more productive farm; but they preferred to remain upon that one because it was their own, descended to them from their forefathers. It had to be sold at last, but they still remained on it, and they worked, always hoping to make it prosper. You used the word 'work' as a term of reproach! Let me tell you, James Chattaway, that if the fact of working is to take the gentle blood out of a man, there will not be much gentle blood left for the next generation. This is a working age, sir; the world has grown wise, and we most of us work with the hands or with the head. Thomas Ryle's son is a gentleman, if I ever saw one—and I am mistaken if his looks belie his mind—and he works. Do not disparage Thomas Ryle again to me. I think there must lie on your mind a sense of the injury you did him, which induces you to do it."

"What injury did I do Thomas Ryle?"

"To usurp Trevlyn Hold over him was an injury. It was Rupert's; neither yours nor his; but had it come to one of you, it should have been to him; *you* had no manner of right to it. And what about the two thousand pounds bond?"

Squire Trevlyn asked the last question in an altered and very significant tone. Mr. Chattaway's green face grew greener.

"I held the bond, and I enforced its payment in justice to my wife and children. I could do no less."

"In justice to your wife and children!" retorted Squire Trevlyn. "James Chattaway, did a thought ever cross you of God's justice? I believe from my very heart that my father did cancel that bond upon his dying bed, that he died believing Thomas Ryle released from it; and that you, in your grasping, covetous nature, kept the bond with an eye to your own profit. Did you forget that the eye of the Great Ruler of all things was upon you, when you pretended to destroy that bond? The eye of your earthly master, Squire Trevlyn, was soon to be closed in death, and you believed yourself safe from consequences; did you forget that there was another eye, that of your heavenly Master, which could not be closed? Did you suppose that eye was turned away, averted, when you usurped Trevlyn Hold to the prejudice of Rupert? Did you think you would be allowed to enjoy it in security to the end? It may look to you, James Chattaway, as it would to any superficial observer, that there has been wondrous favour shown to you in this long delay of justice. I regard it differently. It seems to me that retribution has overtaken you at the worst time: not the worst for you, possibly, but for your children. By that inscrutable law which we learn in childhood, with the Commandments, a man's ill-doings are visited on his children: I fear the result of your ill-doing will be felt by yours. Had you been deposed from Trevlyn Hold at the time you usurped it, or had you not usurped it, your children must have been brought up to play their parts in the busy walks of life; to earn their own living. As it is, they have been reared to idleness and luxury, and will feel their fall in proportion. Your son has lorded it as the heir of Trevlyn Hold, as the future owner of the works at Blackstone, and lorded it, as I hear, in a very offensive manner. He will not like to sink down to a state of dependency; but he will have to do it."

"Where have you been gathering your account of things?" interposed Mr. Chattaway

"Never mind. I have gathered it, and that is sufficient. And now—to go back to Rupert Trevlyn. Will you give me a guarantee that he shall be held harmless?"

"No," growled Mr. Chattaway.

"Then it will be war to the knife between you and me. Mind you—I do not know that there's any necessity to ask you this: as the ricks were not yours, but mine, at the time of the occurrence, you could not, as I believe, become the prosecutor. But I prefer to be on the safe side. On the return of Rupert, if you attempt to prosecute him, the first thing that I shall do will be to insist that he prosecutes you for the assault, the horsewhipping, and I shall prosecute you for the usurpation of Trevlyn Hold. So it will be prosecution and counter-prosecution, you see. Mark you, James Chattaway, I promise you to do this, and you know I am a man of my word. I think we had better let bygones be bygones. What are you going to do about the revenues of the Hold?"

"The revenues of the Hold!" stammered Mr. Chattaway, wiping his hot face, for he did not like the question.

"The past rents up to now. The mesne profits, which you have received and appropriated since Squire Trevlyn's death. Those profits are mine."

"In law," possibly, was the answer. "Not in justice."

"Well, we'll go by law," complacently returned the Squire, a spice of mischief in his eye. "Which have you gone by all these years? Law, or justice? The law would make you refund them to me."

"The law would be cunning to do it," was the answer. "If I have received the revenues, I have spent them in keeping up Trevlyn Hold."

"You have not spent them all, I suspect: and it would be productive of great trouble and annoyance to you were I to come upon you for them. But now, look you, James Chattaway: I will be more merciful than you have been to others, and say nothing about them, for my sister Edith's sake. In the full sense of the word, I will let bygones be bygones."

The ex-master of Trevlyn Hold gazed out from the depths of his dull grey eyes. In point of fact, he was only gazing on vacancy, for every sense he possessed was mentally buried. It might be well to make a friend of the Squire. On the one hand was the long-cherished revenge against his rival Rupert; on the other was his own self-interest. Should he gratify revenge, or should he study himself? Ah, you need not ask:

revenge may be very sweet, but with Mr. Chattaway his own self-interest was sweeter. The scales were not equally balanced, and the one came down with a thump.

He saw that Squire Trevlyn's heart was set on the pardon of Rupert; he knew that with him the less he beat about the bush the better; and he spoke at once. "I'll forgive him," he said. "Rupert Trevlyn behaved infamously, but——"

"Stop, James Chattaway. Pardon him, or don't pardon him, as you please; but we will have no ill names over it. Rupert Trevlyn shall have none cast at him in my presence."

"It is of no consequence. He did what he did in the face and eyes of the neighbourhood, and they don't need to be reminded of what he is."

"And how have the neighbourhood judged?" sternly asked Squire Trevlyn. "Which side have they espoused—yours, or his? Don't talk to me James Chattaway; I have heard more than you suppose. I know what shame the neighbours have been casting on you for years on the score of Rupert; the double shame they have cast on you since these ricks were fired. Will you pardon him?"

"I have said so," was the sullen reply of Mr. Chattaway.

"Then come and ratify it in writing," rejoined the Squire, turning towards the Hold.

"You are ready to doubt my word," resentfully spoke Mr. Chattaway, feeling himself considerably aggrieved.

Squire Trevlyn threw back his head, Trevlyn fashion. It spoke as plainly as ever motion spoke that he did doubt it. As he strode on to the house, Mr. Chattaway in his wake, they came across Cris. Unhappy Cris! His sun of authority and assumption had set. No longer was he the son of the master of Trevlyn Hold, or the heir of Trevlyn Hold: henceforth Mr. Cris must set his wits to work, and take his share in the active labour of life. He stood leaning over the palings, biting a bit of straw as he gazed at Squire Trevlyn; but he did not say a word to the Squire or the Squire to him.

With the aid of pen and ink Mr. Chattaway gave a sort of ungracious promise to pardon Rupert. Of course it had nothing formal in it, but the Squire was satisfied, and put it in his pocket.

"Which is Rupert's chamber here?" he asked. "It had better be got ready. Is it an airy one?"

"For what purpose is it to be got ready?" returned Mr. Chattaway.

"For him. In case we find him, you know."

"You would bring him home? Here? to my house?"

"No; I bring him home to mine."

Mr. Chattaway's face went quite dark with its pain. In good truth it was Squire Trevlyn's house; no longer his; and he may be pardoned for momentarily forgetting the fact. There are brief intervals even in the darkest misery when we lose sight of the present in a gleam of forgetfulness.

Cris came in. "Dumps the policeman is outside," he said. "Some tale has been carried to the police-station that Rupert Trevlyn has returned, and Dumps has come up to see about it. The felon Rupert!" pointedly exclaimed Cris.

"Don't call names, sir," said Squire Trevlyn to him as he went out. "Look here, Mr. Christopher Chattaway," he stopped to add. "You may find it to your advantage possibly to be in my good books; but that is not the way to get into them; abuse of my nephew and heir, Rupert Trevlyn, will not recommend you to my favour."

The police-station had certainly heard a confused story of the return of Rupert Trevlyn, but before Dumps reached the Hold he learnt the wondrous fact that it was another Rupert; the one so long supposed to be dead; the real Squire Trevlyn. He had learnt that Mr. Chattaway was no longer master of the Hold, but had gone down to a very humble individual indeed. The moment the Squire appeared he knew who he must be, and snatched his hat off. Mr. Dumps was not particularly gifted with the perceptive faculties, but the thought did strike him that it might be to the interest of the neighbourhood generally, including himself and the station, to be on friendly terms with Squire Trevlyn.

"Did you want me?" asked the Squire.

"I beg pardon, sir. It was the other Mr. Rupert Trevlyn that I come up about. He have been so unfortunate as to get into a bit of trouble, sir," added Dumps, who may have deemed that Squire Trevlyn had not yet heard of it.

"Oh, that's nothing," said the Squire. "Mr. Chattaway withdraws from the prosecution. In point of fact, if any one prosecuted it must be myself, since the ricks were mine. But I decline to do so. It is not my intention to prosecute my nephew and heir. Mr. Rupert will be the Squire of Trevlyn Hold when I am gone."

"Will he though, sir?" said Mr. Dumps, humbly.

"He will. You may tell your people at the station that I

put up with the loss of the ricks What do you say—the magistrates? The present magistrates and I were boys together, Mr. Policeman, companions; and they'll be glad to see me home again: you need not trouble your head about the magistrates. You are all new at the police-station, I expect, since I left the country—in fact, I forget whether there was such a thing as a police-station then—but you may tell your superiors there that it is not the custom of the Squires of Trevlyn to proclaim what they cannot carry out. The prosecution of Rupert Trevlyn is at an end, and it never ought to have been instituted."

"Please, sir, I didn't have nothing to do with instituting of it."

"Of course not. I am sure the police have not been in the least to blame. I shall walk down to-night, or to-morrow morning, to the station, and put things on a right footing. Your name is Dumps, I think?"

"Yes, it is, sir—at your service."

"Well, Dumps, that's for yourself: hush! not a word. It's not given to you as a policeman, but as an honest man to whom I wish to offer an earnest of my future favour. And now you come into the Hold, and take something to eat and drink."

The gratified Dumps, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels, and inwardly vowing eternal allegiance to the new Squire from henceforth, stepped into the Hold, and was consigned to the hospitality of the lower regions. Mr. Chattaway groaned in agony when he heard the kindly orders of the Squire echoing through the hall—to put before Mr. Dumps everything that was good in the house to eat and drink. That is, he would have groaned, but for the negative comfort of recollecting that the Hold and its contents belonged to another, and not to him.

How strange it all was at the Hold—how unsettled! it may be said, how uncomfortable; for there was the discomfort which arises from strangeness. The young ladies stood peeping and listening: Octave came out as Dumps descended, and stared stealthily—it *was* strange to hear the tones of authority from other than her father or Miss Diana. As the Squire was turning round, he encountered Diana.

"I have been inquiring after my nephew's chamber. Is it an airy one?"

"Your nephew's?" repeated Miss Diana, not understanding. "Do you mean Christopher's?"

"I mean Rupert's. Let me see it."

He stepped up the stairs as he spoke, with the air of a man who was not born to contradiction. Miss Diana followed, wonderingly. The room she showed him was high up, and very small. The Squire threw his head back.

"*This* his room? I see! it has been all of a piece. This room was a servant's in my time. I am surprised at *you*, Diana."

"It is a sufficiently comfortable room," she answered: "and I used occasionally to indulge him with a fire in it. Rupert never complained."

"No, poor fellow! complaint would be of little use from him, and that he knew. Is there a large chamber in the house unoccupied? one that would do for an invalid."

"The only large spare rooms in the house are the two given to you," replied Miss Diana. "They are the best, as you know, and have been kept vacant for visitors. The dressing-room may be used as a sitting-room."

"I don't want it as a sitting-room, or a dressing-room either," was the reply of the Squire. "I like to dress in my bedroom, and there are enough sitting-rooms downstairs for me. Let this bed of Rupert's be carried down to that room at once."

"Who for?"

"For one who ought to have occupied the best rooms from the first—Rupert. Had he been treated as he ought to be, Diana, he would not have brought this disgrace upon himself."

Miss Diana was wondering whether her ears deceived her. "For Rupert!" she repeated. "Where is Rupert? Is he found?"

"He has never been lost," was the curt rejoinder. "He has been all the time literally within a stone's throw—sheltered by Mark Canham, whom I shall not forget."

She could not speak from perplexity; scarcely knowing whether to believe the words or not.

"Your sister Edith—and James Chattaway may thank fortune that she is his wife, or I should visit the past in a very different manner upon him—and little Maude, and that handsome son of Tom Ryle's, have been privy to the secret; have been visiting him in private; have been stealthily doing for him what they could do: but the fear and responsibility have well-nigh driven Edith and Maude to sickness. That's where

Rupert has been, Diana: where he is. I have not long come from him."

Anger blazed forth from the eyes of Miss Diana Trevlyn. "And why could not Edith have communicated the fact to me?" she cried. "I could have done for him better than they."

"Perhaps not," significantly replied the Squire: "considering that Chattaway was the ruler of Trevlyn Hold, and that you have been throughout an upholder of his policy. But Trevlyn has another ruler now, and Rupert a protector."

Miss Diana made no reply. She was too vexed to make one. Turning away, she flung a shawl over her shoulders, and marched onwards to the lodge, to pay a visit to the unhappy Rupert.

CHAPTER LIX.

NEWS FOR MAUDE.

You should have seen the procession going up the avenue. Not that first night, the night of the return of Squire Trevlyn; but in the broad glare of the noon-day following. How Squire Trevlyn contrived to make things straight with the superintendent, Bowen, he best knew, but they *were* made straight. Poor misguided Rupert was a free man again, and Policeman Dumps was the busiest of all in helping to move him.

The easiest carriage that the Hold afforded was driven to the lodge for Rupert. A shrunken, emaciated object he looked as he tottered down the ladder of a staircase, Squire Trevlyn with his powerful frame standing below to catch him if he should make a false step. George Ryle was ready with his protecting arm, and Mr. King, talkative as ever, followed close behind. Old Canham stood leaning on his stick, and Ann, shrinking into herself in her humble fashion, curtsied behind the door.

"It is the proudest day of my life, Master Rupert, to see you come to your rights, recognized as the heir to Trevlyn," cried old Mark, stepping forward.

"Thank you for all, Mark!" cried Rupert, impulsively, as he held out his hand. "If I live, you shall see that I can be grateful."

"You'll live fast enough now," interposed the Squire in his tone of authority. "If King does not bring you round in no time, he and I shall quarrel."

"Good-bye, Ann," said Rupert. "I owe you more than I can ever repay. She has waited on me night and day, Uncle Rupert; she has lain on that hard settle at night, and had no other bed since I have been here. She has offended all her places of work, to stop at home to attend on me."

Poor Ann Canham's tears were falling at the words of kindness. "I shall get my places back, sir, I dare say. All I hope is, that you'll soon be about again, Master Rupert—and that you'll be pleased to excuse the ill accommodation father and me have been obliged to give you."

Squire Trevlyn stood and looked at her. "Don't let it break your heart if the places do not come back to you, Ann Canham. What did you earn by them?—ten shillings per week?"

"Oh no, sir! Poor folks like us couldn't earn such a sum as that."

"Mr. Rupert will settle that upon you from to-day. Don't be overcome, woman. It is only fair, you know, that if he has put your living in peril, he should make it good to you."

She was too much oppressed to answer; she sat down on the settle and sobbed, and the Squire stepped out with Rupert and found himself in the midst of a crowd. The almost incredible news of his return had spread far and wide, and people of all grades and degrees were flocking to the Hold to see him with their own eyes, and to welcome him home. Old men, friends of the late Squire Trevlyn; middle-aged men, who had been hot-headed youths when he, Rupert, went away to exile and supposed death; younger ones, who had been children then and could not remember him, all were there. The chairman of the magistrates' bench himself—grave now in the eyes of the world as became his position, but with a suggestive conscience that could not wholly ignore certain youthful escapades in which he had been a sharer with the very man now resuscitated as it were from death—helped Rupert into the carriage. These magistrates were not likely to be harsh upon the younger Rupert. Magistrates are but men; and those of Barmester had their private likings and dislikings. They would a great deal rather have seen Chattaway transported than Rupert Trevlyn; and they could not help themselves, for there was no prosecutor.

The chairman helped Rupert into the carriage, and shook hands twenty times with the Squire, and entwined his arm within that gentleman's to accompany him to the Hold. The carriage went at a foot-pace, Mr. King inside it with Rupert. "Go slowly; he must not be shaken," were the surgeon's orders to the coachman.

The spectators looked on at the young heir as he leaned his head back on the soft lining of the carriage, which had been thrown open to the fine day. The air seemed to revive Rupert greatly. The warm sun played on his face; lighting up its emaciation, its suspicious hectic, the dead look of the golden curls that surrounded it as a halo; and though some of them started at first at the change, they failed to detect the ominous nature of the signs. That the face, always a beautiful one, had never looked more beautiful than it looked now, was indisputable; and beauty is a great covering to the ravages of disease.

They watched him as he talked with George Ryle, who walked with his arm on the carriage door; they shouted out "Long live Trevlyn's heir!" they pressed round to get a word with him. Rupert, emancipated from the close confinement, from the terrible *dread* that had been upon him, felt as a bird released from its cage—felt as we can imagine we might feel were wings bestowed upon us, and we took our flight to those blissful regions to which we all of us hope some time to attain; and his spirits went up to fever-heat.

He held out his hands to one and to another; he laughingly told them that in a week's time he should be in a condition to run a race with the best of them; he accepted half-a-dozen invitations on the spot. "But you needn't expect him," put in Mr. King, by way of warning. "By the time he is well enough to go out gallivanting, I shall order him off to a warmer climate."

"Why not order him at once, doctor?" cried one.

The surgeon coughed before he replied. "Not just yet. He must get a little stronger first."

As Rupert stepped out of the carriage, he saw, amongst the sea of faces pressing round, one face that struck upon his notice above all others, in its yearning eagerness, its earnest sympathy, and he held out his hand impulsively. It was that of Jim Sanders, and as the boy sprang forward in answer, he burst into tears.

"You and I must be better friends than ever, Jim. Cheer up. What's the matter?"

"It's to see you looking like this, sir. Mr. Rupert, you'll get well, won't you?"

"Oh yes, I feel all right now, Jim. A little tired, perhaps. You come up and see me to-morrow, and I'll tell my uncle who you are and all about you."

Standing at the door of the drawing-room, in an uncertain sort of attitude, was Mr. Chattaway. He was evidently undecided whether to receive the offending Rupert with a welcome, to burst forth into a reproach for the past, by way of relief to his feelings, or to run away altogether and hide himself. Rupert decided it by walking direct up to him, and holding out his hand.

"Let us be friends, Mr. Chattaway. I have heartily repented of the mad passion in which I suppose I set fire to the rick, and I do thank you for absolving me from the consequences. Perhaps you are sorry on your side for the treatment that drove me to it. We will be good friends, if you like."

But Mr. Chattaway did not respond to the generous feeling or touch the offered hand. He muttered something about its having been Rupert's fault, not his, and disappeared. Somehow he could not stand the keen eye of Squire Trevlyn that was fixed upon him.

In truth it was a terrible time for Chattaway, and the man was living out his punishment. All his worst dread had come upon him without warning; a dread which at the best he had perhaps looked upon as dreams of phantasy, emanating but from his own wild imagination. That dread in its worst extent had overtaken him, and he could not rebel against it. There might be no attempt to dispute the claims of Squire Trevlyn; no standing out for his keeping possession of the Hold; Mr. Chattaway was as completely deposed as though he had never held it.

Rupert was installed in his large and luxurious room, everything being pressed into it that could in the least contribute to his ease and comfort. Rupert Trevlyn (speaking of the Squire now) had been tenderly attached to his brother Joe when they were boys together. He so robust, so manly; Joe so delicate. It may be, that the want of strength in the younger only rendered him dearer to the elder brother. As it is in the nature of weakness to cling to strength, so it is in the nature of strength to protect and love the weak; of all our children we love the frailest and weakest the best; the one least physically capable to go through and contend with the battle

of life. Perhaps it was only the old affection for Joe transferred now to the son; certain it was, that the Squire's love had already grown for Rupert, and all care was lavished on him.

But as the days went on it became evident to all that Rupert had only gone home to die. The removal over, the excitement of those wonderful changes toned down, the sad fact that he was certainly fading grew on Squire Trevlyn. Some one suggested that a warmer climate should be tried; but Mr. King, on being appealed to, answered as he had answered in the carriage—that Rupert must get stronger first; and the tone of his voice was as significant now as it had been then.

Squire Trevlyn noticed it. Later, when he had the surgeon to himself, he spoke to him. "King, you are concealing the danger? Can't we move him?"

"I would have told you before, Squire, had you asked me. As to moving him to a warmer place—certainly he could be moved, but he would only go there to die; and the very fatigue of the journey would shorten his life."

"I don't believe it," retorted the Squire, awaking out of his dismay. "You are a croaker, King. I'll call in a doctor from Barmester."

"Call in all the doctors you like, Squire, if it will give you satisfaction. When they understand his case, they will tell you as I do."

"Do you mean to say that he must die?"

"I fear he must; and speedily. The day before you came home I tried his lungs, and from that moment I have known there was no hope. The disease must have been upon him for some time; I suppose he inherits it from his father."

The same night Squire Trevlyn sent for a physician: an eminent man. But he only confirmed the opinion of Mr. King. All that remained now was to break the tidings to Rupert; and to lighten, so far as might be, his passage to the grave.

But a word must be spoken of the departure of Mr. Chattaway and his family from the Hold. That they must inevitably leave it had been unpleasantly clear to Mr. Chattaway from the very hour of Squire Trevlyn's arrival. He gave a day or two to digesting the dreadful necessity, and then he began to turn his thoughts practically to the future.

Squire Trevlyn had promised not to take from him anything

he might have put by of his ill-gotten gains. These gains, though a fair sum, were not sufficient to enable him to live and keep his family, and Mr. Chattaway knew that he must do something to eke them out. His thoughts turned, not unnaturally, upon the Upland Farm, and he asked Squire Trevlyn to let him have the lease of it.

"I'll let you have it upon one condition," said the Squire. "I should not choose for my sister Edith to sink down into obscurity, but she may live upon the Upland Farm without losing caste; it is a fine place both as to its land and its residence. Therefore, I'll let it you, I say, upon one condition."

Maude Trevlyn happened to be present at the conversation. She started forward in the moment's impulse.

"Oh, Uncle Rupert! you promised—you promised——"

"Well, Miss Maude?" he cried, coming to the relief of her hesitation, and fixing his eyes on her glowing face. Maude timidly continued.

"I thought you promised some one else the Upland Farm."

"That favourite of yours and of Rupert's, George Ryle? But I am not going to let him have it. Well, Mr. Chattaway?"

"What is the condition?" inquired Mr. Chattaway.

"That you use the land well. I shall have a clause inserted in the lease by which you may cease to be my tenant at any time by my giving you a twelvemonth's notice; and if I find you carry your parsimonious nature into the management of the Upland Farm, as you have on this land, I shall surely take it from you."

"What's the matter with this land?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"The matter is, that I find the land impoverished. You have spared money upon it in your mistaken policy, and the inevitable result has supervened. You have been penny wise and pound foolish, Chattaway; as you were when you suffered the rick-yard to remain uninsured."

Mr. Chattaway's face darkened, but he made no reply to the allusion. "I'll undertake to do the farm justice, Squire Trevlyn, if you will lease it to me."

"Very well, I will. Let me, however, candidly assure you that, but for Edith's sake, I'd see you starve before you should have had a homestead on this land. It is my habit to be plain: I must be especially so with you. I suffer from you in all ways, James Chattaway. I suffer always in my nephew Rupert. When I think of the treatment dealt out to him from you, I can scarcely refrain from treating you to a taste of the punish-

ment you inflicted upon him. It is possible, too, that had the boy been more tenderly cared for, he might have had strength to resist this disease which has crept upon him. About that I cannot speak; it must lie between you and God; his father, with every comfort, could not escape it, it seems; and possibly Rupert might not have done so."

Mr. Chattaway made no reply. The Squire, after a pause, during which he had been plunged in thought, continued. "I suffer also in the matter of the two-thousand-pound debt of Thomas Ryle's, and I have a great mind—do you hear me, James Chattaway?—I have a great mind that the refunding it should come out of your pocket instead of mine; even though I had to get it from you by suing you for so much of the mesne profits."

"Refunding the debt?" repeated Mr. Chattaway, looking as if he would never understand anything again. "Refunding it to whom?"

"To the Ryles, of course. That money was as surely given by my father to them on his death-bed, as that I am here, talking to you. I feel, I know, that it was. I know that Thomas Ryle, ever a man of veracity, spoke the truth when he asserted it. Do you think I can do less than refund it? I don't, if you do."

"George Ryle does not want it; he is capable of working for his living," was the only answer Mr. Chattaway in his anger could give.

"I do not suppose he will want it," was the quiet remark of Squire Trevlyn; "I dare say he'll manage to do without it. It is to Mrs. Ryle that I shall refund it, sir. Between you all, I find that she was cut off with a shilling at my father's death."

Mr. Chattaway liked the conversation less and less. He deemed it might be as agreeable to leave details to another opportunity, and withdrew. Squire Trevlyn looked round for Maude. He discerned her at the very end of the room, her head bent in sorrow. The Squire suddenly raised it, and found the face pale and weary.

"What's this for, young lady? Because I don't let Mr. George Ryle the Upland Farm? You great goose! I have reserved a better one for him."

The tone was very peculiar, and she raised her timid eyelids. "A better one?" she stammered.

"Yes. Trevlyn Hold."

Maude looked aghast. "What do you mean, Uncle Rupert?"

"My dear, but for this unhappy fiat which appears to have gone forth for your brother Rupert, perhaps I might have let the Upland Farm to George. As it is, I cannot part with both of you. If poor Rupert is to be taken from me, you must remain."

She looked at him, her lips apart, utterly unable to understand him.

"And as you appear not to be inclined to part with Mr. George, all that can be done in the matter, so far as I see, is that we must have him at the Hold."

"Oh, Uncle Rupert!" And Maude's head and her joyous tears were hidden in the loving arms that were held out to shelter her.

"Child, child! Did you think I had come home to make my dead brother's children unhappy? You will know me better soon, Maude."

CHAPTER LX

A BETTER HEIRSHIP.

A SHORT time, and people had settled down into their places. Squire Trevlyn was alone at the Hold with Maude and Rupert, the Chattaways were at the Upland Farm, and Miss Diana Trevlyn had taken up her abode in a pretty house that belonged to herself. Circumstances had favoured the removal of Mr. Chattaway from the Hold almost immediately after the arrival of Squire Trevlyn; otherwise it is hard to say how he would have made up his mind to leave it; and the Squire would scarcely have liked to turn him out summarily, out of consideration to his sister Edith. The occupant of the Upland Farm, who only remained in it because his time was not up until spring, was glad to find it would be an accommodation if he quitted it earlier; he did so, and by Christmas the Chattaways were installed in it.

Mr. Chattaway had set to work in earnest. Things were changed with him. At the Hold, whether he was up and doing, or whether he lay in bed in idleness, his revenues came in to him. At the Upland Farm he must be up early and in bed late, for the eye of a master was always necessary, if the land was to yield its increase; and by that increase he and his

family had now to live. There was a serious battle with Cris. It was deemed advisable for the interest of both parties—that is, for Mr. Cris and his father—that the younger gentleman should enter upon some occupation of his own; but Cris resolutely refused. He could find plenty to do on the Upland Farm, he urged, and he wouldn't be turned out of his home. In fact, Mr. Cris had lived so long without work, that it was difficult, now he was leaving his youth behind him, to begin it. Better, as Squire Trevlyn said, that this change had been made years ago. It *was* hard for Cris; let us acknowledge it. He had been reared to the expectation of Trevlyn Hold and its revenues; he had lorded it as the future master. When he rose in the morning, early or late, as his inclination prompted him, he had nothing more formidable before him than to take a ride on his handsome horse, his groom in attendance behind him. He had indulged in outdoor sports, hunting, shooting, fishing, at will; no care upon him, except how he could most agreeably get through the day, or be home for dinner. He had been addicted to riding or driving into Barmester, and showing himself off in the streets, lounging up and down on foot for the benefit of all admiring spectators, or taking a turn in the billiard-rooms. All that was over now; Mr. Cris's leisure and his greatness had come to an end; his groom would take service elsewhere, his fine horse must be used for other purposes than pleasure. In short, poor Cris Chattaway had fallen from his high estate, as many another has fallen before him, and must henceforth earn his bread before he ate it. "There's room for us both on the Upland Farm, and a good living for both," Cris urged upon his father; and though Mr. Chattaway demurred, he gave way, and allowed Cris to stop there. With all his severity to others, he had lost his authority over his children, especially over Cris and Octave, and perhaps he scarcely dared to maintain his own will against that of Cris, or tell him he should go if he chose to remain. Cris had no more relish for work than any one else has who is reared to idleness; and Cris knew quite well that the easiest life he could now enter upon would be that of staying at home and pretending to be busy upon the farm. When the dispute was at its height between himself and his father, as to what the future arrangements should be, Cris so far bestirred himself as to ask Squire Trevlyn to give him the post of manager at Blackstone. But the Squire had heard quite enough of the past doings there, and told Cris, with the plainness that was

natural to him, that he would not have either him or his father in power at Blackstone, if they paid him for it in gold. And so Cris was at home.

There were other changes also in Mr. Chattaway's family. Maude's tuition, that Octave had been ever ready to find fault with, was over for ever, and Octave had taken her place. Amelia was at home, for expenses had to be curtailed. An outlay that had been quite suitable for the master of Trevlyn Hold, would be unjustifiable and imprudent in the tenant of the Upland Farm. They found Maude's worth now that they had lost her; they could appreciate now the sweetness of her temper, the enduring, gentle patience to which she had constrained herself. Octave, who liked idleness as much as Cris did, had undertaken the tuition of her sisters with a very bad grace: she did not positively refuse, but she hated the trouble and the labour. She might have refused but for Miss Diana Trevlyn. Miss Diana had not lost her good sense or her love of rule in vacating Trevlyn Hold, and she openly told Octave that she must bend to circumstances as well as her parents, and that if she would not teach her sisters, and so save the money, she had better go out as governess and help to earn it. Octave could have beaten Miss Diana for the unwelcome suggestion—*she* go out and earn her living!—but she offered no further opposition to the proposition that she should replace Maude with her sisters.

Ay, and it was hard for Octave, as for Cris; let us not deny it. Alluding not to that one great disappointment which had fallen upon her, and which may as well be passed over in silence, life was hard, very hard just then, for Octave Chattaway. She had inherited the envious, selfish disposition of her father, and the very fact that Maude and herself, as may be said, had changed positions, was sufficient to vex her almost beyond endurance. She had become the drudge whose days must be passed beating grammar and spelling into the obtuse minds of her rebellious sisters; Maude, the young lady of Trevlyn Hold. Whether things would go on as they had begun, it was difficult to say; for the scenes that frequently took place between Octave and her pupils disturbed to a grave degree the peace of the Upland Farm. Octave was impatient, fretful, and exacting; they were self-willed, tantalizing, and disobedient. Noise and quarrels were incessant; and it came now and then to blows. Octave's temper urged her to personal correction, and the girls, unused to it, retorted in kind.

It *was* hard for Octave; it *was* different; she may be no favourite with us, but let us be just. It is in human nature to exaggerate sorrow, and Octave not only exaggerated hers, but did what she could wilfully to increase it. Instead of patiently sitting down to her new duties, and striving to perform them so that they might in time become pleasant, that her change of position might be soothed to her, she steeled herself against them, and augmented her chagrin by every possible means. A terrible jealousy of Maude had taken possession of her; it had long been smouldering; and she did her utmost to enhance it. Jealousy in more senses than one. There was a gate in their grounds which overlooked the highway leading to Trevlyn Hold, and it seemed to be Octave's delight to go and stand there on the watch, at the hour when she might expect Maude to pass. Not a day went by but Maude drove out with her uncle. Sometimes in the open carriage—a new one which the Squire had purchased—sometimes in a close carriage, according to the weather, but always with the marks of wealth and position, the fine horses, the attendant servants—Miss Maude Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold. And Octave would watch stealthily until they were out of sight, and gather in fresh food for her unhappy state of envy until the next day. It would seem most strange that she should thus like to torment herself, but that the human heart is full of such contradictions.

One day that she was standing there, Mrs. Ryle passed. And, speaking of Mrs. Ryle, it may be as well remarked that, Mr. Chattaway excepted, she seemed to be the most aggrieved—not at her brother's return, but at some of the results of that return. In the certainty of Rupert's not living to succeed—and it was all too great a certainty now—Mrs. Ryle had again cherished hopes for her son Trevlyn. She had been exceedingly vexed when she heard of the Upland Farm being leased to Mr. Chattaway; when she watched him and his family move into it; and she thought George must have played his cards badly. She allowed her resentment to smoulder for a time, but one day it burst forth, and she so far forgot herself, forgot past obligations, as to demand of George whether he thought that two masters would answer upon Trevlyn Farm; and she hinted that it was time he was away from it, and made room for Treve.

George, though his cheek burnt—for her, not for himself—answered, with the calmest equanimity, that he expected shortly to leave it—to relieve her of his presence, Treve of his personal advice and help.

"But you did not get the Upland?" she reiterated. "And I have been told this morning that the other farm you thought of is let over your head."

"Stay, mother," was George's answer. "You are ready, I see, to blame Squire Trevlyn for letting these farms, and not to me; but my views are altered. I do not now wish for the Upland, or any other farm. Squire Trevlyn has proposed something else to me—that I should manage his own land for him."

"Manage his own land for him!" she repeated. "Do you mean the land attached to Trevlyn?"

"Yes."

"And where shall you live?"

"With him. At Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle could scarcely speak from amazement. "I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed, staring excessively at the smile hovering on his lips, and which he vainly endeavoured to suppress. "What can be the meaning of it?"

"It is an assured fact, unhappily, that Rupert cannot live. Had he regained his health and strength, he would have filled this place. But he will not regain it, and Squire Trevlyn spoke to me, and I am to be with him at the Hold."

George did not add that he at first fought with Squire Trevlyn against going to the Hold, *its heir*—for indeed it was as nothing else. He would rather make his own fortune, than have it made for him, he said. Very well, the Squire answered with equanimity, he could give up the Hold if he liked, but he must give up Maude with it. And you may guess whether George would do that.

But Mrs. Ryle did not overcome her surprise; she could not see things clearly. "Of course, I can understand that Rupert Trevlyn would have held sway on the estate, would have looked after it, just as a son would do; but what my brother can mean by wanting a 'manager'—by taking you—I cannot understand. You say you are to *live* at Trevlyn Hold?"

The suspicious smile grew very conspicuous on George's lips. "It is so arranged," he answered. "And therefore I no longer wish to rent the Upland."

Mrs. Ryle stared at him as if she did not believe it. She fell into deep thought—thought, from which she suddenly started, put on a bonnet, and went direct to Trevlyn Hold.

A pretty little mare's nest she was indulging as she went along. If Rupert was in this state, was to be called away from

this world, the only fit and proper person to succeed him as the Squire's heir was her son Treve. In which case, George would not be required as manager, and their anticipated positions might be reversed; Treve take up his abode at the Hold, George remain at his old home, the Farm.

She found Squire Trevlyn alone. She gave herself no time to consider the propriety of speaking at all, or the words in which she should speak; but without any circumlocution whatever, she told him that, failing Rupert, Trevlyn must be his heir.

"Oh dear, no," said the Squire. "You forget Maude."

"Maude!"

"If poor Rupert is to be taken, Maude remains to me. And she will inherit Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle bit her compressed lips. "Is it well to leave Trevlyn Hold to a woman? Your father would not do it, Rupert."

"I am not bound to adopt the prejudices of my father. I imagine the reason of his disinheriting Maude—whose birth and existence it appears he did know of—was the ill-feeling he felt towards Joe and her mother, from their having married in opposition to him. But that ill-feeling does not extend to me. Why, Maude, were I capable of leaving the estate away from Joe's children, while one of them is in existence to take it, I should deem myself as bad as Chattaway."

"Maude is a girl; it ought not to be held by a girl," was Mrs. Ryle's reiterated answer.

"Well, that objection need not trouble you; for in point of fact, it will be held by Maude's husband. Indeed, I am not sure but I shall bequeath it direct to him. I believe I shall do so."

"She may never marry."

"She will marry immediately. Why, you don't mean to say he has not let you into the secret?" broke off Squire Trevlyn, as he gazed on her puzzled face. "Has George told you nothing?"

"He has just told me that he was coming here as your manager," she replied, not in the least comprehending Squire Trevlyn's drift.

"And as Maude's husband. My manager, eh? He put it upon that score, did he? He will come here as my son-in-law —I may say it, for I regard Maude as my daughter; as my recognized successor. George Ryle comes here as the future Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

Mrs. Ryle was five minutes before she recovered herself. Utterly unable to digest the news, she could do nothing but stare. George Ryle the future successor! the inheritor of Trevlyn Hold! Was she awake or dreaming?

"It ought to be Trevlyn's," she said at length. "He is your relative by blood, George Ryle is none."

"I know he is not. I do not leave it to him on the score of relationship, but as Maude's husband. He will take the name of Trevlyn. You should have got Maude to fall in love with the other one, if you wished him to succeed."

Perhaps it was the most unhappy moment in all Mrs. Ryle's life. Never had she given up the hope of her son's succession until now. That George should supplant him!—George, whom she had so despised by the side of Treve—so put upon! She sat beating her foot on the carpet, her pale face bent.

"It is not right; it is not right," she said, at length. "George Ryle is not worthy to be the successor to Trevlyn Hold: it is reversing the order of things."

"Not worthy!" echoed Squire Trevlyn. "Your judgment must be strangely prejudiced, Maude, to say it. Of all those who have flocked here to welcome me home from the different parts of the country, far and near, I have looked in vain for a second George Ryle. He has not his equal. If I hesitated at the first moment to give him Maude, I don't hesitate now that I know him. I can tell you that had Miss Maude chosen unworthily, as your sister Edith did, her husband would never have come in for Trevlyn Hold."

"Is your decision irrevocable?"

"Entirely so. I wish them to be married immediately; for I should like George to be installed here as soon as may be, and, of course, he cannot come until Maude is his. Rupert wishes it."

"It appears to me that this arrangement is very premature," resumed Mrs. Ryle. "You may marry yet, and have children of your own."

A change came over Squire Trevlyn's face. "I shall never marry," he said, with emphasis; and to Mrs. Ryle's ears there was a strange solemnity in his tone. "You need not ask me why, for I shall not enter into my reasons; let the assurance of the fact suffice—*I shall never marry*. Trevlyn Hold will be as securely theirs as though I bequeathed it to them by deed of gift."

"Rupert, this is a blow for my son."

"If you persist in considering it so, I cannot help that," was the reply of Squire Trevlyn. "It must have been very foolish of you, Maude, ever to cast a thought to your son's succeeding, while Joe's children were alive."

"Foolish! when one of my sons—my step-son at any rate—is to succeed, as it seems!"

The Squire laughed. "You must talk to Maude about that. They had settled plans together before I came home. If Treve turns out all he should be, I may remember him before I die, Maude. Trevlyn Farm was originally the birthright of the Ryles; perhaps I may make it so again in the person of Treve. There! don't let us go on discussing: it will bring no good. Will you see Rupert?"

She had the sense to see that if the discussion were prolonged until night, it would indeed be productive of no good, and rose to follow him into the next room. Rupert, with the hectic still upon his cheeks, but not looking very ill, sat in a chair near the fire. Maude was reading to him.

"Is it you, Aunt Ryle!" he called out. "You never come to see me."

"I am sorry to hear you are so poorly, Rupert."

"I am not half as ill as I feared I should be," he said. "I thought by this time it—it would have been all over. But I seem better. Where's George?"

"George is at home. I have been talking to your uncle about him. Until to-day I did not know what was in contemplation."

"He'll make a better Squire for the Hold than I should have made," cried Rupert, lifting his eyes—bluer and brighter than ever, the effect of disease—to her face, whilst Maude made her escape from the room, and Squire Trevlyn had not entered it, so that they were alone. "But, Aunt Ryle, I want it to be soon; I want it to be before I die. I should like George to be here to see the last of me."

"I think I might have been informed of this before," observed Mrs. Ryle.

"It has not been told to any one. Uncle Rupert, and I, and George, and Maude have kept the secret between us. Maude was shy, and did not wish it talked of. Only think, Aunt Ryle! that after all the hopes, the contentions, the heart-burnings, it should be George Ryle to succeed to Trevlyn Hold."

She could not bear this repeated harping on the string; she could not bear it. George's conduct to his step-mother had

been exemplary, and she did not remain insensible to the fact; but she was one of those second wives (there are such in the world) who feel an instinctive dislike—a jealousy—of their step-children. Very bitter, for Treve's sake, was the jealousy that burnt in her heart now.

"I will come in and see you another day, Rupert," she said, starting up. "I am too vexed to remain longer this morning."

"What are you vexed about, Aunt Ryle?"

"I was in hopes that Treve—failing you—would have been made the heir of Trevlyn Hold."

Rupert opened his eyes in wonder. "Treve?—while Maude lives! Not he. I can tell you what I think, Aunt Ryle; that Treve, had there been no Maude, would never have come in for the Hold. I don't fancy Uncle Rupert would have left it to him."

"To whom then would he have left it, do you fancy?"

"Well—I suppose," slowly answered Rupert, turning the matter over in his mind—"I suppose, in that case, it would have been my aunt Diana. But there *is* Maude, Aunt Ryle, and we need not talk about it. George and Maude will have it, and their children after them."

"Poor boy!" she said, with a touch of compassionate feeling; "it is a sad fate for you! Not to live to be the heir!"

A gentle smile rose to his face, and he pointed upwards. "There's a better heirship for me, Aunt Ryle."

It was upon returning from this memorable interview with Squire Trevlyn, that Mrs. Ryle encountered Octave Chattaway. She stopped to speak.

"Are you getting pretty well settled, Octave?"

"Tolerably so. Mamma says she shall not be straight in six months to come. Have you been to the Hold?" continued Octave.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ryle, turning her determined face full on Octave. "Have you heard the news? That the Squire has chosen his heir?"

"No," breathlessly rejoined Octave. "We have heard that Rupert is entirely beyond hope; but we have heard nothing else. It will be Maude, I conclude."

"It is to be George Ryle."

"George Ryle!" repeated Octave, in amazement.

"Yes. I suppose it will be left to him, not to Maude. But it will be all the same. He is to marry her, and to assume the name of Trevlyn. George never told me of this. He just said

to me to-day that he was going to live at the Hold; but he never said it was as Maude's husband and the Squire's heir. How prospects have changed!"

Changed! Ay, Octave felt it to her inmost soul, as she leaned against the gate, and gazed in thought after Mrs. Ryle. Gazed without seeing or hearing, deep in her heart's tribulation, her hand pressed upon her bosom, her pale face shivering as it was turned to the winter sky.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN THE CHURCH AT BARBROOK.

BENDING in tenderness over the couch of Rupert Trevlyn was Mrs. Chattaway. Madam Chattaway no longer; she had quitted that distinctive title when she quitted Trevlyn Hold. It was a warm day in early May, and Rupert had lingered on; the progress of his disease being so gradual, so imperceptible, that even the medical men were deceived; and now that the end (as was soon to be seen) had come, they were still saying that he might last until the autumn.

Rupert had been singularly favoured: some, stricken by this dire malady, are so. Scarcely any of its painful features were apparent; and Mr. Daw wrote them word that they had not been in his father. There was scarcely any cough, scarcely any pain, and though the weakness was certainly great, Rupert had not for one single day taken to his bed. Until within two days of this very time, when you see Mrs. Chattaway leaning over him, he had gone out in the carriage whenever the weather permitted. He could not sit up much; he chiefly lay on the sofa as he was lying now, facing the window, which he liked to have open to the warm noon-day sun. The room was the one you have seen frequently before, the former sitting-room of Mrs. Chattaway. When the Chattaways left the Hold, Rupert had changed to their rooms; he seemed to have a fancy for them, and would sit there and watch the visitors who came up the avenue.

Mrs. Chattaway has been stopping at the Hold since the previous Tuesday, for Maude is away from it. Maude left it with George Ryle on that day, but they are coming home this even-

ing, Saturday, for both are anxious not to be long away from Rupert. Rupert sadly wanted to attend the wedding, and Squire Trevlyn and Mr. Freeman strove to invent all sorts of schemes for warming the church; but the edifice persisted in remaining cold and damp, and Rupert was not allowed to venture into it. He sat with them, however, at the breakfast afterwards, and but for his attenuated form and the peculiar hectic that excitement brought to his otherwise white and hollow cheeks, might have passed very well for a guest. George, with his marriage, has taken the name of Trevlyn, for the Squire insisted upon it; he will come home to the Hold to-day and take up his permanent abode in it—Mr. Ryle Trevlyn. Miss Diana received mortal offence at the wedding-breakfast, and sat at the table cold and impenetrable, for the Squire requested his eldest sister to preside in right of her birthright, and Miss Diana had long considered herself of far more importance than Mrs. Ryle, and had expected to be chief on that occasion herself.

"Shall we invite Edith or Diana to stay here with you while Maude's away?" the Squire had inquired of Rupert. And a flush of pleasure came into the wan face as he answered, "My aunt Edith. I should like to be again with Aunt Edith."

So Mrs. Chattaway had remained with him, and passed the time as she was doing now—hovering round his couch, giving him all her care, caressing him in her loving, gentle manner, whispering of the happy life on which he was about to enter.

She had some eau-de-cologne in her hand, and was pouring it on a handkerchief to pass it lightly over his brow and temples. In doing this a drop went into his eye.

"Oh, Rupert, I am so sorry! How awkward I am!"

It smarted very much, but Rupert smiled bravely. "Just a few minutes' pain, Aunt Edith, and it will all be gone. Do you know what I have got to think lately?"

She put the cork into the long narrow green bottle, and sat down on the chair close to his sofa. "What, dear?"

"That we must be blind, foolish mortals to fret ourselves so much under misfortunes. A little patience, a little time, and they are sure to pass away."

"It would be better for us all if we had more patience, more trust," she answered. "If we could leave things more entirely to God."

Rupert lay with his blue eyes cast upwards, blue as the sky he looked at. "I would have tried to put that great trust in

God, had I lived," he said, after a pause. "Do you know, Aunt Edith, at times I do wish I could have lived."

"I wish so, too," she murmured.

"At least, I should wish it but for this great feeling of fatigue that is always upon me. I shan't feel it up there, Aunt Edith."

"No, no," she whispered.

"When you get near death, knowing for certain that it is coming upon you, as I know it, I think you obtain clearer views of the *reality* of things. It seems to me, looking back on the life I am leaving, as if it were of no consequence at what period we die; whether we die young or live to be old; and yet how dreadful a calamity death is looked upon by people in general."

"It needs sorrow or illness to reconcile us to it, Rupert. Most of us must be tired of this life ere we can bring ourselves to anticipate another, and to look for it."

"Well, I have not had so happy a life here," he unthinkingly remarked. "I ought not to murmur at exchanging it for another."

No, no, he had not. The words had been spoken without thought of wounding her, were quite innocent of intentional reproach; but she was feeling them to the very depths of her long-bruised heart. Mrs. Chattaway was not famous for the control of her emotions, and she broke into a flood of tears as she rose and bent over him.

"The recollection of the past is upon me night and day, Rupert. Say that you forgive me! Say it now, ere the time for it shall have gone by."

He looked surprised. "Forgive you, dear Aunt Edith? I have never had anything to forgive you; and others I have forgiven long ago."

"I lie awake at night and think of it, Rupert," she said, the tones of her voice betraying how great was her emotion. "Had you been differently treated, you might not have died just as your rights are recognized. You might have lived to be the inheritor as well as the heir of Trevlyn."

Rupert lay pondering the proposition. "But I must have died when the end came," he said. "I might not have been any the better for it. Aunt Edith, it seems to me to be just this. I am twenty-one years of age, and a life of some sort is before me, a life *here*, or a life *there*. At my age it is only natural that I should look forward to the life here, and I did so until I grew sick with the weariness of lying in pain. But now, if that

life is the better and happier one—and if it were not, what forlorn, hopeless creatures we should all be!—does it not seem a favour to be taken to it before my time? Aunt Edith, I say that as death comes on, I believe we see things as they really are, not as they seem. I was to have inherited Trevlyn Hold; but I shall exchange it for a better inheritance. Let this comfort you."

She sat, weeping silently, holding his hand in hers. Rupert said no more, but kept his eyes fixed upwards in thought. Gradually the lids closed, and his breathing, somewhat more regular than when he was awake, told that he slept. Mrs. Chattaway laid his hand on the coverlet, dried her eyes, and busied herself about the room.

About half-an-hour afterwards he awoke. She was sitting down then, watching him. It almost seemed as if her gaze had caused his eyes to open, for she had only just taken her seat.

"Are they come?" were his first words.

"Not yet, Rupert."

"Not yet! Will they be long? I feel sinking."

Mrs. Chattaway hastily called for the refreshment which Rupert had until now constantly taken. But he turned his head away as it was placed before him.

"My dear, you said you were sinking!"

"Not *that* sort of sinking, Aunt Edith. Nothing that food will remedy."

A tremor came over Mrs. Chattaway. She detected a change in his voice, saw the change in his countenance. It has just been said, and not for the first time in this history, that she could not boast of much self-control: and she ran out of the room, shrieking for Squire Trevlyn. He heard her, and came immediately, wondering much. "It is Rupert," she said in her irrepressible excitement. "He says he is dying."

Rupert had not said it: though, perhaps, what he did say was almost equivalent to it, and she had jumped to the conclusion. When Squire Trevlyn reached him, he was lying with his eyes closed and the changed look on his white face. A servant stood near the table where the tray of refreshment had been placed, gazing at him.

The Squire hastily felt his forehead, then his hand. "What ails you, my boy?" he asked, subduing his voice as it never was subdued, save to the sick Rupert.

Rupert unclosed his eyes. "Are they come, uncle? I want Maude."

"They won't be long now," looking at his watch. "Don't you feel so well, Rupert?"

"I feel like—going," was the answer: and as Rupert spoke he gasped for breath. The servant stepped forward and raised his head. Mrs. Chattaway, who had again come in, broke into a loud cry.

"Edith!" said the Squire, reprovingly. "A pretty one you are for a sick room! If you cannot be calm, you had better keep out of it."

He quitted it himself as he spoke, called his own groom, and bade him hasten for Mr. King. Rupert looked better when he returned; the spasm, or whatever it was, had passed, and he was holding the hand of Mrs. Chattaway.

"Aunt Edith was frightened," he said, turning his eyes on his uncle.

"She always was one to be frightened at nothing," cried the Squire. "Do you feel faint, my boy?"

"It's gone now," answered Rupert.

Mrs. Chattaway poured out a cordial, and he drank it without difficulty. Afterwards he seemed to revive considerably, and spoke to them now and then, though he lay so still as to give an idea that all motion had departed from him. Even when the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue he did not stir, though he evidently heard.

"It's only Ralph," remarked the Squire. "I sent him out in the gig."

Rupert slightly shook his head then to express a negative, and a half-smile illumined his face. The Squire also became aware of the fact that what they heard was not the noise of gig-wheels. He went down to the hall-door.

It was the carriage bringing back the bride and bridegroom. Maude sprang lightly in, and the Squire took her in his arms.

"Welcome to your home, my darling! A brave welcome to you, Madam of the Hold!"

Maude laughed and blushed, and the Squire left her and took the hand of George. Yes, it was true: henceforth she was "Madam" of the Hold.

"How is Rupert, sir?"

"Well—he has been famous until half-an-hour ago. Since then there has been a change in him. You had better go up to him at once; he has been asking for you and Maude. I have sent for King."

George drew his wife's hand within his arm, and led her up

stairs. No one was in the room with Rupert, except Mrs. Chattaway. He never moved, never stirred, as they advanced and bent over him, Maude throwing off her bonnet; he only gazed up at their faces from his sofa-pillow with a happy smile.

Maude's eyes were swimming; George was startled. Surely death was now, even now, upon him. It had come closer in this little minute between Squire Trevlyn's departure from the room and his return.

He lay passively, his wasted hands in theirs. Maude was the first to give way. "My darling brother! I did not think to find you like this."

"I am going on before, Maude," he breathed, but his voice was so low they had to stoop to catch it. "You will come later."

A wailing cry interrupted him; it came from Mrs. Chattaway. "Oh, Rupert, say you forgive the past! You have not said it. You must not die with unforgiveness in your heart."

He looked at her wonderingly; a look which seemed to ask if she had forgotten his assertion of an hour ago. He laid his hands together, feebly holding them raised. "Pray God bless and forgive all who may have been unkind to me, as I forgive them—as I have forgiven them long ago. Pray God bless and forgive us all, and take us after this world's over to our home in heaven; for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"Amen!" said the Squire.

The deep silence which fell on them, after the sonorous tones of the one word had died away, was broken only by the sobs of Maude, as she knelt. George laid his hand gently on her head that she might feel its loving protection; he knew how bitter was the moment to her.

The next interruption was caused by Mr. King. He came quietly up to the sofa, glanced at the face of Rupert, and kept his eyes fixed on it for the full space of a minute. Then he turned them meaningly on Squire Trevlyn. The face, though they had known it not, was already the face of the dead. With the sorrows and the joys of this world, Rupert Trevlyn had done for ever.

The long procession of mourners wound down the avenue of Trevlyn Hold. The hearse was first, containing the remains,

but all followers were on foot. With the Squire walked his son-in-law and acknowledged heir, George Ryle—or Ryle Trevlyn, as he was henceforth to be called; and next to them came Mr. Chattaway, and Mrs. Ryle's son, Trevlyn.

Yes! Mr. Chattaway, who—as may be said—had hunted Rupert to death, yet saw fit to attend the funeral. Do you remember that the etiquette touching funerals in this rural neighbourhood was alluded to early in this history? That same etiquette prevailed still; and Mr. Chattaway had not deemed it good manners to refuse when the invitation came. It was not as *James Chattaway* that it was sent to him, but as Edith Trevlyn's husband; and the Squire had a battle with himself ere he could be brought to send one at all. Old Canham, too infirm to walk to the church, stood at the gate in his Sunday clothes, and bared his head as they swept past him, paying his last respects to the dead heir of Trevlyn.

It was a large and goodly company to gather round the grave. Thomas Ryle's funeral, years ago, had been scantily attended; this was different. Many faces familiar to you were among them: the doctors mentioned in the story, the lawyers, Mr. Wall of Barmester, Mr. Apperley and his sons, the clerk Ford from Blackstone; even Policeman Dumps was there. How did Mr. Chattaway like standing amongst them? How did he like to feel that George Ryle, whom he would so have put upon, was from henceforth his master? Suddenly the even flow of Mr. Freeman's voice was marred by a burst of sobs, and many eyes were turned to the quarter, and found the interruption came from Jim Sanders. Mr. Dumps inwardly vowed a chastisement for the breach.

The coffin was lowered into the grave of the Trevlyns, and sorrowful eyes pressed forward to catch a glimpse of its plate. The inscription had been made in accordance with the will and pleasure of Squire Trevlyn:—

RUPERT TREVLYN,

HEIR OF TREVLYN HOLD,

DIED MAY 2ND, AGED TWENTY-ONE.

It was so. The true heir, was he, of Trevlyn Hold, the sole heir of Squire Trevlyn. But God had taken him from his heirship before he could enter upon it. A great calamity, some of those mourners are thinking. No, it was no calamity; for as

Rupert himself had said in his last illness, he had but resigned a poor earthly heirship to enter upon that heavenly one which fades not away.

They left his body to its kindred earth, and wound their way back again. Oh, my friends! may we learn to strive for that true heirship, without which all other heirships will avail us nought! Fare you well!

THE END.

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